NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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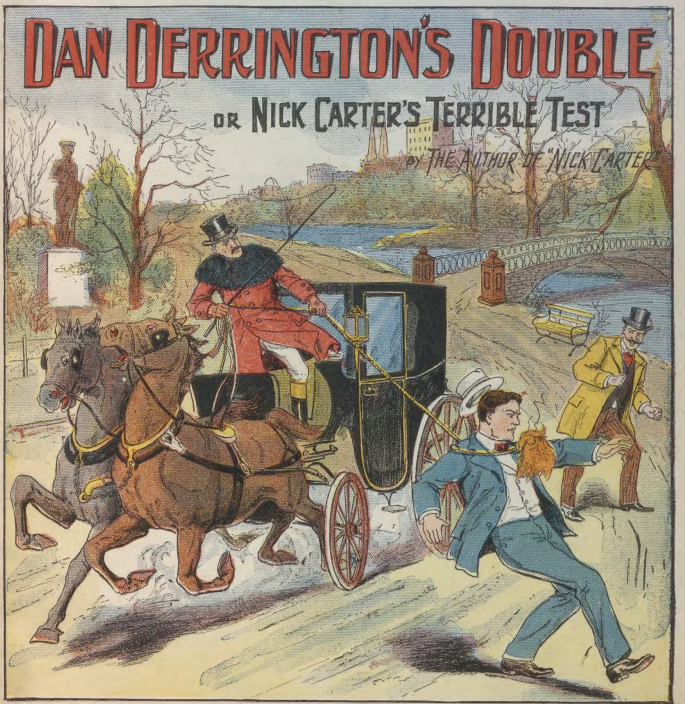
DAN DERRINGTON'S DOUBLE

OR NICK CARTER'S TERRIBLE TEST

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



A huge loop shot forward like a long snake and fell true to its aim over the detective's shoulders.

Announcement. Readers of this weekly will find that the stories have been increased more than one-third over their former length. This increase is made in response to a general demand that the weekly be issued more frequently than once a week. To do that is impossible, but we have increased the length to show our appreciation of the favor with which these stories have been received. You will find that there is no drop in the quality with the increase. From this on, these stories will be the longest as well as the best of their kind published.

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DAN DERRINGTON'S DOUBLE;

OR,

Nick Carter's Terrible Test.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A HUMAN MYSTERY.

Nick Carter, in company with his friend, Clarence Morgan, was seated at one of the tables in the billiard room of the Waldorf-Astoria, and they were engaged in chatting together—in reality, they were discussing the remarkable circumstances of Morgan's marriage, and the events which led up to it—when Morgan suddenly leaned forward and seized the detective by the arm.

"For Heaven's sake, Nick, look there!" he exclaimed.

The detective turned his eyes in the indicated direction, and he was almost as startled, and certainly quite as astonished, as his companion.

"It's Derrington, isn't it?" asked Morgan, in a breathless whisper.

"If it isn't Derrington, it's his double," replied Nick, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the man who was slowly approaching them across the great room, threading his way among the tables in such a manner that he would be obliged to pass quite close to the spot where the detective and his companion were seated.

"He's coming this way, too," muttered Morgan.

"Yes. Wait. Keep silent," replied Nick.

The man drew steadily nearer, and presently he made another turn which brought him directly past Nick Carter, so close that he would be obliged almost to brush against him in passing.

He seemed to be in search of some one, for his eyes were roving inquiringly around the huge room, over the heads of those nearest to him, and he seemed not to have seen the two persons who had suddenly developed such an interest in his personality, and whom he was on the point of passing within touching distance.

As he came nearer, Nick turned his chair so that it en-

tirely blocked the passage of the approaching man—a fact which he did not discover until he stood directly in front of the detective.

Then he came to a halt and looked down.

His eyes met Nick's, but there was not the slightest expression of recognition in them; on the other hand, Nick immediately rose from his chair and confronted the man.

"Mr. Derrington, I believe," he said, coolly.

The stranger—if such he really was—looked smilingly down upon the detective, for he was considerably taller than Nick. Then he laughed aloud.

It was a pleasant laugh, however. There was nothing offensive about it; and he followed it immediately by a remark.

"Really," he said, "this is most remarkable. My dear sir, I have not the least idea who you are, but you are the fifth person who has accosted me by that name since I entered the hotel. May I ask you—quite politely, of course—who the devil is Mr. Derrington?"

"You are," replied Nick, coolly, and without moving from his position, which blocked the further progress of the other man.

"Oh, no; I'm not. Sorry to disappoint you, but you have made a mistake. It would appear that I must keep somebody with me for the purpose of identification, since people refuse to believe me when I insist that I am not Mr. Derrington. Why, even one of the clerks of the hotel gasped and almost fainted when I tried to register. I really thought for a moment that they would refuse me a room."

"It is a wonder that they did not," said Nick.

"I believe they did go to the extent of calling the hotel detective, and I understand now that he took the trouble to telephone somewhere; at all events, they kept me waiting for some time before I could be accommodated. I should resent your insistence, sir, if I did not believe you to be honestly deceived."

"Would you mind telling me who you are?" asked Nick.

"Not at all. It will give me pleasure to present my card. Here it is. I do not think that you can make Derrington out of it."

He removed an elaborate cardcase from his waistcoat pocket, extracted one of the cards and gave it to the detective; and then, with a bow, he turned and presented another to Clarence Morgan.

Engraved upon the card was the name, "Mr. Charles Jameson Covington," and in the lower, left-hand corner, written in with a fine-pointed pen, was "Lexington, Ky."

Nick Carter was not undeceived. He still believed the man before him to be the outlaw, Dan Derrington, notwithstanding the fact that not two hours before that very moment he had himself seen Dan Derrington occupying a cell at police headquarters in Mulberry Street.

But, for reasons of his own, he determined on the spot to pretend to accept the explanation offered, and so, the instant he glanced at the card, he altered his entire demeanor, and frankly apologized.

"It is really a most remarkable likeness, Mr. Covington," he said. "Permit me to present you to my friend, Mr. Morgan. For myself, I am Mr. Felix Parsons."

"Thank you, gentlemen," replied Covington, bowing.

"And now," said Nick, "won't you do me the favor to have a seat with us. I was just on the point of ordering when I saw you approaching."

"Thank you; I——"

"You were looking for a friend, perhaps. I thought that was your attitude, when I discovered you. Here, waiter. Take our orders, will you? Be seated, Mr. Covington."

The stranger accepted the proffered chair which the waiter pushed into place behind him, and then he looked across the table at the detective, and smiling again, he said:

"There is still an expression of doubt in your eyes, Mr. Parsons. Perhaps it might be well if you should follow the example of the hotel detective, and also use the telephone."

"Oh, no," replied Nick. "That is entirely unnecessary —now."

"Thank you. Pray, tell me, who is this Mr. Derrington, whom I so strangely resemble?"

"He is an outlaw," replied Nick, shortly.

"The devil he is!"

"Well, there is considerable of the devil about him, at that."

"Humph! Then it behooves me to shave off my mustache, or to do something to destroy this unpleasant likeness; eh?"

"You would have to do more than that, sir."

"How do you mean?"

"If you seek to destroy the resemblance you bear to Derrington, you should begin by putting a hump on your shoulders, for your figure, your carriage, your walk, are each exactly a counterpart of his; you should alter the cut of your hair as well as its color, for both are exactly like his; you should take vocal lessons and change your voice, for it is precisely the same as his; you should study the Delsarte system, and so discover a different expression for your eyes, for they are Derrington's over again; you should perform some sort of manual labor, and thus harden as well as change the shape of your hands, for they are precisely what his hands are; you should visit a dentist and introduce a touch of gold among your teeth, for yours are as perfect, as white and as uncommon as Derrington's; you should carry your cigar differently when you hold it in your mouth, for you reproduce his mannerisms exactly in that particular; you should even study to sit differently in your chair, for you at this mo-

ment enjoy his favorite attitude. So you see, my dear sir, that it would be idle for you to hope to destroy the resemblance by the mere removal of your mustache."

"Really, Mr. Parsons, what you say is most extraordinary."

"It is nevertheless true."

"And this—er Derrington, you say, is an outlaw?"

"Yes."

"That is rather a Western expression, is it not? I thought you called them crooks when they infested cities."

"Oh, well, Derrington is not exactly a crook. I don't think he would pick your pocket, or climb through a second-story window; but he would not hesitate to rob you at a game of poker, or to hold you up on the highway and relieve you of your valuables."

"Something of a distinction, without much difference, is it not?"

"Perhaps. He is a Western production, you know."

"Indeed?"

"I think he must have been about twenty, or twenty-one years old when I knew his father, ten years ago, in Denver. He was a gambler, and I always thought him on the square, too."

"And the son is not?"

"Decidedly not."

"Did you know the whole family?"

"Oh, no. Only the father. I did not know even that he had a son—but his resemblance to his father is so striking that he could not deny his paternity——"

"Remember that you might say the same thing of me."

"I was about to add that the name was also the same."

"Ah! yes. I've got the best of him in that particular, at least."

"Perhaps it would be a good idea, Mr. Covington, if I should tell you something of the history of this Derrington whom you so strangely resemble. It might be of value to you in the future, when you are mistaken for him."

"I should be indebted to you if you will do so."

"He came here with his sister and brought others with him, not long ago. They organized a conspiracy against my friend here—Mr. Morgan—who possesses a bank account which excited their cupidity; they got some of it, too."

"Well, well!"

"At the present moment, Derrington is supposed to be occupying a cell at police headquarters, while his friends —that is, all save his sister, who has disappeared—are in the tombs, which is our city prison."

"Ah!" said the stranger; "then it was doubtless to your police department where the hotel detective telephoned while I was waiting to be given a room, eh?"

"Without doubt."

Nick turned then to Morgan.

"Shall I tell Mr. Covington the rest of the story?" he asked; and he winked slyly at the same time, with his off eye, indicating to Morgan that for reasons of his own he desired to do so.

"Why, yes, if you like," replied Morgan. "I have no doubt that we can trust to the discretion of Mr. Covington."

"Entirely so, I assure you," replied Covington.

"It is rather a delicate matter," continued Nick, "and you will understand why Mr. Morgan dislikes to discuss it; but I really think, since you look so much like Derrington, and are so much like him, that you should be supplied with the whole story."

"Thank you."

"My friend's experiences began by his being induced to enter a carriage with Derrington and two associates of his. That time they robbed him of ten thousand dollars, and it was a case of his money or his life."

"The true Western style, eh?"

"Quite so."

"And what next?"

"There were several nexts; but only one which is important. The Derrington party lived here at this hotel. He posed under the name of Maitland. His sister was supposed to be a Miss Agnes Sutherland. He once made the statement to a friend of Morgan's, that Miss Sutherland was his wife, but that was only one of his bluffs. She posed as the fiancée of a Mr. Pearson, who was of their party. She was really Derrington's sister, and she is now Mrs. Morgan."

"What! The wife of this gentleman?"

"Exactly. Mr. Morgan accompanied their party on a night expedition to Chinatown. During the evening he was drugged, and while in that condition he was married to Miss Derrington."

"My goodness! It was a plot, wasn't it?"

"Decidedly."

"I sincerely hope, for the sake of Mr. Morgan, that Miss Derrington proved to be a better woman than she appeared."

"It is my belief," replied Nick, slowly, and weighing his words with great care, "that Miss Derrington was a much better woman than she appeared, and that Mrs. Morgan—as she is now properly called—is, in reality, a good woman."

"I believe you said that she had disappeared?"

"Yes. She warned Mr. Morgan of the plot against him, in time to save him, and then she disappeared as suddenly as if the earth had opened and swallowed her."

Nick kept his eyes riveted upon the face of the man whom he was addressing while he made this statement, and particularly the first part of it, and he saw—or, at least, believed that he saw, a sudden gleam of anger appear in his eyes; but it was so sudden and so transitory, that even he could not be sure of it. However, he waited

anxiously for what the stranger would say next—and he could almost have prophesied the question, word for word.

"Then Mr. Morgan has no idea where his wife is."

"None whatever," replied Nick, smiling. "I hope this story has not bored you, Mr. Covington."

"Not at all. I have found it most interesting; very remarkable, in fact. And now, gentlemen, I must leave you. I will be happy to meet you again at any time. I am stopping here, at the hotel, and if you will some time do me the favor to call upon me, I shall be pleased."

"Thank you."

Covington left the table and strolled across the room slowly, at last disappearing through the door into the corridor.

"What in the name of all that's extraordinary, did you tell that fellow my story for?" demanded Morgan, of Nick.

"Because he is no more Charles Jameson Covington than you are."

"Eh? You think——"

"I don't think; I know!"

"Do you mean to say that that fellow is—is Derrington?"

"That is precisely what I mean to say."

"Then why in blazes didn't you nab him and take him back where he belongs?"

"Because I am not onto the game, yet."

"But if he is Derrington, he couldn't be here and in a cell at headquarters at the same time."

"Granted; but it is evident that they think, down at headquarters, that he is there, while at the same time I am equally convinced that he is here. His interest in the disappearance of your wife, and the gleam of anger which came into his eyes when I told him that she sent you a warning, was sufficient proof to satisfy me."

"I suppose that is why you told him the story, just to ring that in on him, eh?"

"Precisely."

"Why don't you telephone down to headquarters?"

"The hotel detective did that."

"All the same——"

"No; I shall go down there in person after a while. Telephoning would not satisfy me at all."

"Then you honestly think that this fellow, who calls himself Covington, is Derrington?"

"I do."

"Then who is in the cell at headquarters?"

"A substitute."

"But, geewhizz, old man, how could that be? It isn't likely——"

"I haven't the least idea how it could be—now; and I won't have any idea about it until I have been to headquarters to investigate on my own account. But, all the same, you can put your wad on this fellow for Derrington."

"Well, I'll be——"

"You needn't be—yet. Wait. I'm afraid you are not a very close observer, Clarence."

"Maybe not. What do you refer to now?"

"Why, it was plain that Covington—we will continue to call him that for the present—discovered us the moment he entered the room. It is plain to me that he was in reality in search of us. After he saw us, he purposely threaded his way among the tables so that he would approach us, at the same time keeping his eyes raised over our heads, as if he were in search of somebody whom he could not find."

"Well, admitting that he is Derrington, what was his game?"

"He wished me to accost him. He wished to have the worst part of his ordeal over at once, and as he believes, for all time; but more than all, he wished to bring our talk around to his sister."

"Aha! That's the idea, eh?"

"Sure. He wishes to find her."

"Humph!" said Morgan.

"Now, don't forget one thing. He would never have had the audacity to come into this room, and face us as he did, if his tracks were not so well covered that he had practically no fear that he would be unable to work the Covington dodge to the end. He knows where he's at in that particular, and he told me about the hotel detective telephoning about him, just to convince me of it, too."

"I see."

"But the point of the whole thing, Clarence, is the fact that he wants to find Agnes."

"Well, what of it? Let him find her if he wants to."

"That would be very much against my advice."

"Oh, bosh! You've been preaching about her ever since that infernal marriage."

"Her action would have saved your life, even if I had not been there to do so."

"Well, you were there."

"She is none the less deserving, because of that."

"She married me by fraud."

"Granted; but you are not informed by what means she was forced to do so. That she was not a willing party to the act is proved by her conduct since it happened."

"I don't see it in that light."

"I do. Remember that she disappeared before she knew that her brother and the others were arrested, or were to be arrested."

"I wish I could think about her as you do, Nick; but I cannot."

"You were pleased with her when you knew her only as Miss Sutherland."

"Immensely. If she had not posed as Pearson's fiancée, I am not sure that I should not have fallen—er—almost in love with her."

"I think we should make an effort to find her, Clarence."

"I don't."

"If for no other reason than to prevent her from coming again in contact with her outlaw brother."

"I cannot believe that Covington is Derrington."

"You will learn to believe it, perhaps too late."

"What are you going to do about finding the truth out, positively?"

"I'm going to telegraph to the chief of police of Lexington, for one thing. I am going now to police headquarters, for another. I wish to discover who is there, in Derrington's cell, in his place—for there is somebody there."

"May I go with you?"

"Certainly."

"And if you find that Derrington is there—what then?"

"I shall believe that I am getting in my dotage, that's all."

"The whole thing is a kind of a mixed-up mess, isn't it, Nick?"

"Rather; but we'll unmix it."

"I think you will find that Derrington is there, and that Covington is Covington, after all."

"If I do, Clarence, I will believe that there is a whole lot deeper plot against you in this game than I have ever suspected yet. But come. We will go down there at once. We will see with our own eyes, and become convinced in one way or the other, in our own minds."

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERIOUS SUBSTITUTION OF MEN.

They found the inspector alone in his office when they arrived at the marble building in Mulberry Street.

"Have you sent Derrington over to the tombs yet?" asked Nick, as he accepted a chair and a fresh cigar with

"No; but I thought I would do so this afternoon. There is no good keeping him here any longer."

"Suppose you have him brought up here for a moment or two," continued the detective. "I would rather like to have a chat with him."

"You'll be disappointed, then, for he won't talk."

"No?"

"Won't say a word. Won't open his head."

"Do you mean that he won't reply to questions?"

"Oh, he'll answer once in a while; but most of the time he looks at you with a smile on his handsome face, and says nothing. But I'll have him up if you care to have a try at him, Nick."

"I do."

The inspector rang a bell and directed that Derrington be brought to his office.

Ten minutes later, the prisoner appeared, led in by one of the officers.

Morgan started, and uttered an exclamation of surprise; then he glanced triumphantly at the detective.

Even Nick was for an instant nonplused, for it seemed to each of them that the very man with whom they had drunk and talked in the billiard room of the Waldorf was now standing before them.

Nick regarded him narrowly, without speaking.

With all his skill, he could not discover a point of difference between this man and the other, who had announced himself as Covington, save, possibly, that slight difference of complexion which might have been produced by the confinement in a cell.

The height, the figure—in fact, every point which Nick had touched upon while he talked with Covington, was the same.

For a moment even the detective was dismayed—and then he returned to his first belief about the matter, more strongly than ever.

Before he addressed a question to the prisoner, he turned again to the inspector.

"Griswold and Barnes brought Derrington here, when he was arrested at Morgan's apartment, did they not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Are they in the building now?"

"I think so."

"Will you call them in here for a moment?"

The bell was rung again, and presently the two detective sergeants entered.

"You remember the night you arrested this man?" he asked of Griswold.

"Yes, sir; sure."

"Did you bring him directly here from Mr. Morgan's rooms?"

"Certainly."

"Did you stop anywhere on the way?"

"Why, yes; he had to do so."

"Where?"

"At Wakeley's, on Sixth Avenue and Forty-second Street. We left the train there and went into the saloon. It was necessary, or we would not have consented."

"Was he out of your sight at all while you were there?"

"Well, theoretically, he was; but I stood within three feet of him all the while, and he could not have gotten away to save his life. He didn't get away, and so there was no harm done. We had to stop, Mr. Carter, or I wouldn't have done so."

"I understand. How long were you there?"

"Fifteen minutes, perhaps."

"Where were you, Barnes?" asked Nick, turning suddenly to the other officer.

"I waited outside, in the bar. I was talking with Wakeley."

"Did your prisoner see anybody whom he recognized while you were in there?"

"I don't think so."

"Did you see anybody whom you thought he recognized?"

"No; that is, only Wakeley himself. He knew him."

"Oh! He did, eh? Did you have a drink at the bar?"

"Yes; Derrington offered to treat, when we were coming out—no, when we went in, it was."

"And you both accepted?"

"Yes, sir, we did."

"How long did you stand at the bar?"

"Not more than five minutes."

"Don't you think you were running chances?"

"Well, perhaps you may think so, sir, but we didn't."

"It was after the drink that you went into the other room, downstairs; eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you, Barnes, remained in the barroom?"

"Yes, sir, right at the head of the stairs."

"What did you do when you left Wakeley's?"

"Took the elevated and came to the Bleecker Street station, and from there directly to headquarters."

"You didn't stop again, did you?"

"No, sir."

"Who put the prisoner in his cell?"

"We did; that is, we saw it done."

"Very well; that is all."

As the two officers were leaving the room, Nick discovered that the eyes of the prisoner were fixed quizzically upon him; but he did not speak to the man until they had gone out and closed the door.

"I suppose you were greatly interested in that conversation?" he said, then, addressing the prisoner.

"Quite so," came the reply, and Nick started.

"Have you caught cold since you have been in your cell?" he asked.

"A little, I think."

"I ask, because there seems to be a hoarseness in your voice."

"Undoubtedly," was the calm reply.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Covington, who hails from Lexington, Kentucky?" asked the detective; "or did you ever know such a man?"

"Never."

"Did you ever hear of a man named Capt. Whitney?"

"Nev—oh, yes, of course; but I had forgotten. He was a fake, you know. I believe you should be better informed on that point than I, Mr. Carter."

"You caught yourself just in time, then, didn't you?"

The prisoner's only reply was an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"You will have to be on your guard better than that," continued the detective, "if you expect to play this game successfully to the end."

The prisoner remained silent, but he smiled genially. He seemed not to be in the least disturbed by the situation.

"What in the world is this all about?" asked the inspector, who had listened in silence thus far.

"Send the prisoner back downstairs and I'll tell you," replied Nick.

The prisoner was returned to his cell without further questioning.

"Now, Nick, what are you driving at?" asked the inspector.

"This: The man who was just here is not the same man who was arrested under the name of Dan Derrington at Clarence Morgan's apartment, in the Mammoth."

"Nonsense! Griswold and Barnes brought him direct here."

"Oh, no, they did not. They stopped at Wakeley's."

"What of that?"

"Simply that another man managed to change places with the prisoner somewhere, and it was either at Wakeley's or at Morgan's rooms, before they left the place."

"You were at Morgan's rooms yourself, were you not?"

"Certainly."

"It couldn't have happened there without your knowledge, could it?"

"I don't think so; all I know about it is that it happened somewhere."

"Do you mean to say that this fellow we've got here is not Derrington?"

"He may be a Derrington, but I'm positive in my own mind that he is not the Derrington."

"What do you think, Mr. Morgan? You knew Derrington, didn't you?"

"I should say I did."

"Well, isn't this man who was just brought in here Derrington?"

"I would be willing to take my oath that he is—but I have just seen a man at the Waldorf about whom I would take the same oath."

"Oh, I see. This is a case of 'double,' is it?"

"It's a case of dead ringer!" replied Morgan.

"Did you think that we had allowed Derrington to escape, Nick?" asked the inspector.

"Yes; and I still think so," was the uncompromising reply.

"I didn't think you could be fooled by a likeness, Nick."

"I'm not; nor would you be, if you were as familiar with the matter as I am."

"I don't see where there was any chance for a substitution of persons to occur; do you?"

"Not unless it happened at Wakeley's."

"Well, suppose it were possible that it could have happened there, it would have been necessary that Derrington should have known early in the evening that he was to be arrested; that he would be taken away from Morgan's rooms about a certain time; that he would be taken

the elevated road; that he could induce the officers to rmit him to get off at Forty-second Street, and—why, g whole thing is preposterous. You have been fooled a chance resemblance, that is all. I have no doubt, w, that if you were to bring the two men together, and ace them side by side——"

"George, did you ever know me to be deceived in a atter of that sort?"

"No; I can't say that I ever did."

"Well, I'm not deceived now."

"You seem to be mighty certain of it."

"I am certain of it. So certain that I'll stake my repuion on it. The man whom Morgan and I met at the aldorf this afternoon was Derrington. The man who a prisoner now downstairs is not the Derrington who ld Morgan up in the carriage and stole ten thousand llars of him."

"Well, I'll stake my reputation on the fact that the man ho was just brought into this room is the same man who as brought here from Morgan's apartment by Griswold d Barnes."

"There was a substitution somewhere," insisted Nick. was never more positive of anything in my life."

"I don't see how you will ever be able to establish such condition."

"I will establish it, or I will go out of business; you n bet your life on that. If I am fooled—if I am wrong, ll give up detective work and take to the lecture platrm."

"I'll be your manager," laughed the inspector. "I think u'd make even a greater fortune at that. Every boy New York would attend."

"This is no joke, old chap. I'm in dead earnest."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing at present. But there are two things which wish you would do about it."

"What?"

"I wish you would wire the chief of police at Lexingn, Kentucky, for complete information about Charles neson Covington, if there is such a person known t e, and ask him, at the same time, to forward you a h tograph of the man, if it is possible to procure one."

"That's easy. I'll attend to that at once."

"Then I wish you would find a way to keep this fellow ere, under your own eye, for a time yet."

"I can do that all right, too."

"I don't want him sent to the tombs yet."

"I'll engage to keep him here as long as you wish me do so. I can fix that."

"I want him kept solitary, too."

"Sure."

"Don't let anybody see him, save the officers who have rect charge of him. Don't let him receive a message any kind—at least, not until I have heard it, or seen if it is a letter."

"All right, Nick. Now, what about the other fellow?"

"The other fellow is Derrington—*the* Derrington, as I have told you."

"Well, what about him? What are you going to do at his end of the line; eh?"

"I don't know yet. I'll answer that after we hear from Lexington."

"That will be before midnight. I'll send the answer to your house as soon as it arrives. But we won't have the photograph—even if there is one—for two or three days."

"I know that; but you'll have a description. Have the chief wire a complete one—if there is a man by that name there, or if one by that name has ever lived there."

"I'll do it."

"I'll go now. You will send that message up to me as soon as it arrives?"

"Sure."

"Come along, Clarence. We've got things to do now."

Morgan's private carriage was at the door, for they had come down in that, and Nick directed the driver to take them at once to his own house.

"Chick," he said to his assistant, as soon as they arrived, "I've got a little shadow work for you to do, and you'll find it about the most difficult proposition you ever tackled."

"The more difficult it is, the better I will like it."

"Then this one ought to suit you to death. There is a chap registered at the Waldorf, under the name of Charles Jameson Covington, Lexington, Kentucky. He's your man."

"All right."

"Wait. The man is really Derrington."

"Derrington! Do you mean that Dan Derrington has been liberated?"

"No. The prisoner whom Griswold and Barnes took to headquarters is there yet, and he is not likely to get away, either; but in some inexplicable manner Derrington—*the* Derrington, understand—did not go there at all."

"Is it a case of playing your own game, and making up to represent another?"

"No. The fellow at headquarters is not made up. I took particular notice of that fact. Nor is the one at the hotel."

"And you think the last one is the real one, eh?"

"I know it. I'm as positive of it as if I had seen the substitution made. Send Patsy to me, Chick, as you go out."

Patsy came in a moment, and to him the detective said:

"Lad, I want you to take a letter, which Mr. Morgan will write for you, and to which I shall add a line or two, to the Hotel Mammoth. You'll have to be a hall boy there for a while."

"Yes, sir."

"There are no particular instructions for you, save that

you are to keep an extra close watch on Mr. Morgan's apartment, and to see and know about everybody who appears. I'll give you more specific instructions later, if any are necessary.

"And now, Morgan," he added, "if you will just write a letter to the proprietor, telling him to take Patsy on, and not to mention to anybody why he has done so, we will close that part of the incident."

This was soon accomplished, and as soon as Patsy had departed, and the detective was again alone with his client, Nick added:

"I don't think you half realize your danger, Clarence."

"Danger? What danger?"

"Dan Derrington means to do one of two things with you."

"Oh, does he? What are they?"

"He means to make a bargain with you, by which you will consent to give up a million or two, or—he means to murder you; and I am strongly inclined to believe that his inclination tends toward the latter idea."

"You're a nice, soothing, pleasant sort of a prophet to have around, aren't you?"

"Pleasant or no, I believe it is true. The one thing I am not sure about, is whether he considers it important to find his sister—your wife—or not, before he acts, but I am inclined to think he does."

"You think, if I were dead, that he would establish the marriage and collect the dower."

"I think that's his game—yes. He'd establish the marriage, all right, and then he'd either get the dower rights for his sister, or he'd make some sort of a settlement with your heirs—and you know, as well as I do, and as he does, that he would be likely to get even more in that way, for your people would not want the scandal about the marriage, and they would pay well to keep the whole thing out of the papers."

"I guess you're right about that."

"There is only one thing which would stand in his way, and for that reason I am inclined to think that he wants to find Agnes before he acts."

"What is that?"

"Your wife herself."

"Say, Nick, if you don't mind, that word 'wife' sort of sticks in my crop. I don't like it. I haven't got used to it yet, and I don't think I will, right away. But why do you suppose she would stand in his way?"

"Because, if I am any reader of character, and I think I am, I don't believe that she will ever consent to act against your interests again, and I don't believe that even her brother can force her to do so. Clarence, we must find her."

"All right. Find her if you want to; only don't bring us together. That's all I care about it."

"I must find her before Dan Derrington discovers her."

"All right, Nick; only, as I said before, leave me o of it."

"I don't believe she is very far away, Clarence."

"I earnestly hope, old chap, that she is in heaven by t time."

"Let us also hope that you do not get there before s does."

"Do you really think it is as serious as all that?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, I'm not going to flunk."

"I know that."

"Only it is not exactly pleasant to think that a fello like Derrington is chasing around in the dark, ready stick a knife into my back, or to put a bullet throu my brain from some dark hallway, or to fill my sher bottle with a deadly poison. What do you advise me do, Nick?"

"I'm going to give you an extra servant."

"The blazes you are! Who?"

"My assistant, Ten-Ichi. You know him?"

"Yes."

"You go along home now, and I'll send him to you t evening. You had better remain indoors to-night, un I make up my mind just what course to pursue about t case."

"All right. But, say; old Joseph, my valet, will nev let Ten-Ichi remain in the house an hour, he'll be jealous."

"Take Joseph into your confidence. Tell him who Te Ichi is, and why he is there."

They parted then, Morgan to go to his home and N to remain in a brown study over the case which h suddenly assumed such extraordinary features.

At eight o'clock that evening he dispatched Ten-Ic to the Hotel Mammoth, and at nine o'clock—as soon Ten-Ichi arrived there—Nick received a telephone m sage from the young Japanese assistant, the first senten of which was:

"Mr. Morgan is not here. He has not been home sin morning, and Joseph has no idea where he is."

Nick Carter was amazed.

"I wonder if this is Derrington's work," he murmur

CHAPTER III.

THE FIENDISH WORK OF AN ASSASSIN.

Nick Carter was positive that it had been Claren Morgan's intention to go directly to his home when left the detective's house, and therefore the announceme from Ten-Ichi that he had not been there, and that had not communicated with Joseph, was startling.

The engagement made between him and the detecti concerning the sending of Ten-Ichi to the house was su that the detective knew that Morgan would have kept

he could—that is, that he would not have permitted y trivial matter to have interfered.

'And yet," he mused, "it was broad daylight when he t here, and it seems incredible that anything could ve happened to him at that time of day. I ought not have permitted him to have gone a moment unattended, th Derrington at large."

"What shall I do now?" asked Ten-Ichi, over the phone.

"Remain where you are, and wait. Wait there until comes, or until I do. In the meanwhile, you might nd Joseph to visit Morgan's haunts."

He returned the receiver to its rack then, and, realizing at Derrington knew him perfectly well as he was, he gan an alteration in his dress and equipment before iving the house.

When he did go out, finally, he represented a Southner, who might have just blown into the city from ississippi or Texas. In the first place, he donned a ard.

He wore the broad-brimmed, slouch hat, the rather ng hair, the loose coat, the low, turn-down collar and e low-cut vest which Southerners are addicted to, and had the unmistakable swagger of the far South.

Who has not seen that swagger? There is nothing e it anywhere else in the world. It suggests almost ything, but, more than all else, the probable presence a long-barreled revolver or two in the region of the p pockets.

It was nine o'clock when Nick Carter left his house, d he could think of no better place to go for his purses than the regular "stamping ground" of Derrington d his associates—the Waldorf.

"I wonder if Derrington is working alone now, or he has imported more assistants to his aid," he mused, he walked along. "His old crowd is in prison. Bruce lbot, Dick Tabor, Albert Pearson—they are all there."

When he entered the hotel, he made his way directly to e billiard room, passing, however, through the bar as approached it.

There is a screen on the billiard room side of the door ich communicates between the two rooms, and just Nick was passing it, he came face to face with Der'gton—or Covington, as we must continue to call him.

To Nick's surprise, Covington stopped short directly his path, and it flashed through the detective's brain that instant that in some inconceivable way the outlaw cognized him, although there was nothing in his manner suggest it.

Nick raised his eyes in well-feigned astonishment when e other man opposed his passage through the narrow ay, and Covington at once apologized.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I thought you were friend of mine. I see now that I was mistaken. But, dear sir, you are from the South, are you not?"

"Why, yes," replied Nick, "and if I might make a shrewd guess, I should say that you were from the West."

"You're wrong," said Covington, laughing. "I'm from the South also; from Kentucky."

"Kentucky, eh? I reckon that's a mighty fine State, although I've never been there."

"Will you have a drink?" asked Covington. "That is what I was after when I encountered you, and I would like to have company."

"No, thank you. I have an important engagement just now."

The detective bowed and passed on. He had caught a glimpse of Chick, who was approaching the screen, and he managed to brush close to them as they passed each other between the tables.

"Don't lose sight of him on any account until you put him to bed," he said, sharply, in Chick's ear, as they passed; and then he hurried on through the hotel and out at the Thirty-fourth Street door, where he took a cab and directed that he be driven at once to the Hotel Mammoth.

"I think I'll leave Mr. Charles Jameson Covington to the tender mercies of Chick for to-night," he mused, as he was driven rapidly toward his destination.

Patsy was seated in the office of the hotel when Nick entered, having already entered upon his duties as bell boy, to which Nick had assigned him, and the detective at once approached him.

"Well, Patsy," he said, "is anything doing?"

"Mr. Morgan has just come in," replied Patsy.

"Good," said Nick. "That's splendid. I'll write a card over at the desk, and do you take it up, and tell him who I am."

Ten minutes later the detective was seated in Clarence Morgan's parlor, face to face with his friend.

"What in the world happened to you?" asked Nick, as soon as he was seated. "You have given me quite a fright. I was afraid the enemy had got you already."

"I've seen Miss—that is, Mrs.—oh, confound it all, I've seen my wife!" was the reply.

"Good! Did you talk with her?"

"No; and I have my doubts if she saw me at all, although I thought at the time that she did."

"Where was it?"

"Here, at the door of this hotel."

"Ah! When you came here on your way home from my house?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

"There isn't very much to tell. As I drove up at the door I saw a woman standing with one foot on the bottom step, as if she were in the act of entering the Mammoth, but at the same instant, if she had had that intention, she changed her mind, for she turned and crossed the sidewalk rapidly to a coupé, sprang into it, and was driven away."

"And you followed her?"

"Yes; I remembered that you considered it important to find her, and I thought my duty to you made it incumbent upon me to follow her, and if possible find out where she is hiding."

"Quite right. Are you sure it was your wife?"

"Certainly."

"Well, tell me what happened."

"I opened the trap in my own conveyance and told my coachman to follow the other coupé until the passenger inside it alighted, if it took him all the rest of the day and all night as well."

"And so, you discovered where she is staying?"

"That is just what I did not do."

"Why not?"

"Because she fooled me."

"Ah! Then she was aware of the fact that she was pursued."

"She must have been. Anyhow, she got away from me."

"Where, and how?"

"At Wanamaker's store. Her driver went down the avenue as if the devil was after him. We arrived in front of Wanamaker's just before their closing time, and she got out and went inside, while her coupé drove around into Tenth Street and waited there. I thought that was good enough for me, and that she would surely return, so I waited, too."

"But she did not return, eh?"

"No. I waited there an hour, watching that coupé, and then it quietly drove off without its passenger. I saw that I had been fooled, and that doubtless she had gone directly through the store to the Fourth Avenue entrance, and had taken a car there, or another conveyance of some sort."

"That is doubtless exactly what she did. What did you do then?"

"I followed the empty coupé."

"Well?"

"The driver took it to a stable in Twenty-fourth Street near Third Avenue and drove inside. That is where the coupé belonged."

"I see. I suppose you talked with the driver?"

"Yes; and much good it did me—nit! He swore that he knew nothing about his fare. Said he picked her up at his station, at Madison Square, and that she had paid him liberally for his time."

"What about his waiting and then driving away without her?"

"She merely told him, when she got out, to wait there for her for an hour, and if she did not return by that time, it would be because she had met some friends and gone in another direction; in which case he need wait no longer. He was paid for the time, so he waited, and at the expiration of the hour, he drove to the stable."

"And so she fooled you."

"How do you suppose she knew that she was fo lowed?"

"She may not have been aware of it. She may ha taken the precaution on general principles."

"Well, anyhow, you were right, Nick, and she isn't away."

"More than that, Clarence. She evidently came to t hotel with the express purpose of having an intervi with you, but her courage failed her at the last mome and when she decided to come, you may rest assured t it was for the purpose of giving you some warning."

"A warning?"

"Yes; of the danger you are already in—of the dan I have tried to impress upon you."

"Then why did she take such extraordinary prec tions to escape me, when I followed her?"

"I have already told you that she probably took th precautions on general principles, and without knowi that she was followed."

"Anyhow, Nick, she was here once before to-day."

"She was? Why did you not tell me that at once?"

"I hadn't got to it."

"How do you know that she was here?"

"From my valet's description."

"Joseph's?"

"Yes."

"He saw her, then?"

"Certainly. The clerk telephoned up from the of that there was a lady at the door in a cab who wished speak with me. Joseph replied that I was not at ho but that he would go down himself, immediately."

"What time was that?"

"About three, he says."

"Well?"

"When he went to the door of the coupé, she told h that it was Mr. Morgan with whom she wished to sp and Joseph replied that he was my man, and, inasmuch I was not at home, he thought that perhaps she would to leave a message. She told him no, and that she w call again, later."

"And he described her, did he?"

"Exactly. It could have been no other."

"Well, I want you to remain indoors to-morrow. T haps she will call again."

"And if she does, you wish me to receive her?"

"My dear Clarence, you must see her and you talk with her."

"I'd rather meet a tiger with young cubs, right in middle of a jungle, old man."

"I haven't a doubt of it; all the same, I think you find that the meeting will not be an unpleasant one. going now. It is almost eleven o'clock. Good-nig I'll have a word with Joseph and Ten-Ichi as I go ou

There was a large and comfortable room in the r

the apartment, where Joseph made his headquarters, here Nick found him, and Ten-Ichi was with him.

Isn't this room rather far removed from Mr. Mor-'s?" he asked, as he entered it.

I'm a light sleeper, sir," replied Joseph. "Nobody ld enter this apartment without my being aware of

Where are you to sleep, Ten-Ichi?"

There is no place for me, save here in the room with eph," replied the young Jap.

There is a couch in the parlor. You had better sleep re. I would like to have you a little closer to Mr. rgan."

Nick left the hotel, then returned to the Waldorf; there was no sign of Covington about anywhere, and presently returned home.

The fact that Chick was not anywhere about, either, le him certain that Covington had gone out and that ick was after him, and he knew that he would receive eport at his own house more quickly than anywhere ; besides, he thought that the telegraph message must e arrived from Lexington by this time, and he was ious to see it.

t was there when he arrived. It read as follows:

Charles Jameson Covington resides on the Belden ce, one mile out of city limits. He is about thirty rs old. Six feet tall. Dark, handsome, graceful; k eyes and hair, rather square chin, with deep dimple he kind commonly called split chin; deep, soft, musical ce; quick, alert manner. Came here five years ago. married. Nothing known about his antecedents or vious history. Is said to be in New York City at the sent time."

That was all.

The message was signed by the chief of police of kington. It made no mention of a photograph, and k decided that the chief had not yet ascertained ther or not he could procure one.

But with such a description, a photograph was entirely ecessary.

More than that, it was rather in the nature of a "facer" the detective, and seemed, at the first glance, utterly demolish his theory.

Almost any other person than Nick Carter would have ided at once that he was wrong, and that Covington s really Covington, after all, and that there had been substitution of one man for another in the matter of arrest and imprisonment of Dan Derrington.

Not so with the detective, however.

e was just as certain as ever in his own mind that he not deceived in his ideas of the case. He was just oroughly convinced in his own mind that Covington the real Dan Derrington, and that the man in the t headquarters was not, as he had been when he d the matter over with the inspector.

"There is only one way to explain it," he mused, holding the message in front of him as he read it through a second and a third time, "and that is, that the two men are brothers—twins, perhaps. Oh, for a chance to have half an hour's talk with Agnes!

"By Jove! I think I have the idea. They are brothers! They are twins! One of them has gotten himself into some sort of trouble, and has gone to Kentucky, where he settled under an assumed name, just as the other one came here and posed under the name of Maitland.

"Aha! I am getting at it now. Let me see what sort of a conjectural case I can build out of it."

He leaned his head on his hands and lost himself in deep thought for several moments.

Then, suddenly, he started erect again.

"That's the idea!" he exclaimed. "I see it all now. It's as plain as the nose on my face, if only I can prove it. Dan Derrington sent for his brother to come here from Kentucky, and he arrived in the city before the night of the arrest. Then, for some reason, he sent his brother to represent him at that supper, while he, himself, remained away. I did not see the difference, because I was not looking for anything of the kind, and they are so thoroughly alike that it is doubtful if I would have discovered any in any case.

"So! The man I grappled with and arrested, is the man who is now at headquarters, but all the same, he is not Dan Derrington—and the real Dan has simply laughed in his sleeve, adopted his brother's name, knowing that investigation would establish him, and dared to face me boldly.

"By Jove! It was a clever thing to do; but I wonder how long the brother who is in prison will stand it?"

He threw away the stump of his cigar, then, and went to bed, resolved that he would go to the Mammoth the first thing in the morning, and tell Morgan all about it.

But he little realized what that coming morning was to develop, although at that very moment—for it was then past two o'clock—the incidents were happening which were ultimately to bring him face to face with the most terrible test he had ever endured.

He was astir early in the morning, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour of his retiring, and at half-past eight o'clock he entered the Hotel Mammoth and walked directly to the elevator.

He wore no disguise now, and he nodded toward the clerk as he passed.

At the door of Morgan's apartment, he rang the bell; and he was infinitely surprised, after waiting a considerable time, to receive no answer.

He rang again, and still there was no response to his summons.

A third ring brought about the same result—that is, nothing.

"Strange," he murmured; and he looked up and down the corridor for a chambermaid to open the door for him.

There was none in sight, however, and as the lock on the door seemed to be an ordinary one, he had recourse to his wonderful little picklock, and in a moment more the door swung open before him.

He passed through and closed it after him, and instantly he perceived that the place was filled with the odor of chloroform.

Chloroform will evaporate and disappear after a time succeeding its use, but it will inevitably leave behind it an unmistakable odor which to the initiated there is no mistaking.

The detective was startled.

The door which communicated with the room occupied by Joseph was nearest to him, and he sprang toward it first; and, as he threw it open, he stared in amazement at what he saw.

The bed which Joseph was in the habit of occupying was in one corner of the room, and now, stretched upon it, bound and gagged, with his feet and his hands fastened to the four corners of the bed frame, was Joseph.

He was conscious, for his eyes were open, but he could make no sound save an inarticulate gurgle.

In the corner opposite was a cot, and stretched upon it, in much the same manner in which Joseph had been served, was Ten-Ichi. His eyes were also open, but he was utterly powerless to move or to speak.

The detective's clasp knife was out in an instant, and it was the work of only a moment to sever the bonds and to remove the gags.

Then, without waiting an instant for explanations, the detective started through the private hallway of the apartment toward Clarence Morgan's bedroom.

A door opened into that room from the end of the hall, but it was closed and locked, so he was obliged to return and to pass through the library and parlor.

He paused for one instant, astounded by what he saw in the library, for the room appeared as if a cyclone had struck and utterly devastated it.

The desk had been torn open, and its contents were strewn all over the place. The drawer from the library table had been turned upside down on the floor. A filing cabinet in one corner was in a state of chaos, and its contents had been strewn everywhere.

He comprehended all this in one quick glance; then he passed on to the parlor.

Here the devastation was as complete as in the library, but he scarcely gave it a glance, for he leaped with one bound to the door of the bedroom, which opened off from it.

And there he saw at a glance that his worst fears had been realized.

Clarence Morgan was stretched, face downward, on the bed, and the hilt of a bowie knife protruded from his back, while blood from the murderous wound had sa rated the clothing of the bed, and had dripped in a sl gish stream to the carpet on the floor.

The small safe in the corner of the room had b broken open and rifled—he saw that even as he disc ered the body of his friend, but he paid no heed t then.

His only thought was Morgan.

He leaped toward him and dropped upon his kn at his side, at the same time exclaiming, brokenly, he was greatly moved:

"Clarence! Clarence! Old chap! Great God! why I not remain here myself? Why? Why?"

CHAPTER IV.

CLARENCE MORGAN'S MURDERERS.

Instantly the detective perceived that Clarence Mor was still alive, although it was equally apparent that de was very near.

He was breathing only in spasmodic gasps, and it evident that there had been serious internal hemorrha and that life was now almost at its last ebb.

He made a heroic effort to reply to Nick, and he succeed in turning his head, just a very little, so that detective could see the rapidly glazing eyes of his dy friend.

"All up—Nick," he gasped. "All—up—you—ri Agnes—tried——"

He choked with another flux of blood from his mo The terrible weapon had penetrated his lungs, and moment he tried to speak he choked.

"Who did it, Clarence? Who did it?" asked N breathlessly.

The dying man fixed his glazing eyes upon the tective and tried with all his remaining strength to re but he could not utter a word.

His lips moved, but no sound came from them.

For a moment he stared in this way at his friend, a all his soul was struggling to say something; but the ef was fruitless.

Then, after a moment, a shudder passed through body; he stiffened under it, and then his form rela Presently his lips parted in a smile, and then—his dropped open, and Clarence Morgan was dead.

Long afterward Nick Carter confessed that he never so unnerved in his life as he was at that momen

He loved Clarence Morgan dearly. He honored and respected him, and somehow he felt that his d was in some manner due to his own negligence, w yet he knew that it was not.

For many minutes he remained there on his knees side the bed, and he was only aroused by hearing a cry of anguish behind him.

Then he leaped to his feet and turned in time to see Joseph as he threw himself prostrate upon the body of his master.

The management of the hotel was at once notified. Doctors were sent for, as a mere matter of formality, and the coroner was summoned.

Nick himself telephoned to the police station of that precinct, and discussed the event with the captain over the wire, so it happened that within two hours from the time when the tragedy was discovered, the body of Clarence Morgan was given into the hands of the undertaker.

In the meantime, Nick Carter took the matter seriously in hand at once.

He began his investigation with Ten-Ichi, but the young assistant knew little or almost nothing about the incidents of the night, and he was nearly prostrated by remorse over what he termed his own neglect.

"I ought not to have slept at all after what you said to me," he said to the detective. "I should have remained on the watch without closing my eyes."

"Tut, tut!" replied Nick. "I did not tell you to do that. What I did tell you to do, was to make your bed on the couch in the parlor, so that you would be quite near to Mr. Morgan throughout the night. Why did you not do that?"

"Because Mr. Morgan would not permit it."

"Did he absolutely refuse to allow you to do so?"

"Yes, sir. When I told him what you had said, he laughed, and replied that it was all nonsense. He directed me to go into the room with Joseph, and to remain there, which, of course, I was obliged to do."

"It was after eleven o'clock when I left here," said Nick. "What time did you retire?"

"Within half or three-quarters of an hour after you went away."

"And did you go to sleep at once?"

"No; I think I must have remained awake nearly an hour."

"Did you notice whether Joseph was sleeping or not?"

"I think he dropped asleep almost immediately."

"What is the last thing you remember before you went to sleep?"

"I heard the clock in the parlor strike once, but I did not know whether it announced the half hour after midnight, or one o'clock."

"And after that?"

"I have not a single recollection after that until I awoke with a splitting headache, just as dawn was breaking this morning."

"And you woke to discover that you were bound and helpless, and that you had been gagged, also?"

"Yes. I struggled with all my might to get loose, but without avail. I could not call out; I could not break the ropes which held me; I could do absolutely nothing, and I remained exactly as you found me, until you came."

"You were not even semiconscious during the time when the assassins were here? You have no recollection of anything that occurred?"

"Not a particle."

The detective turned to Joseph.

"Are the facts the same in your case?" he asked.

"Almost; but not quite."

"Ten-Ichi says he thinks you dropped asleep at once. Do you also think the same?"

"Yes, I am quite sure I did."

"What is your last recollection of the night? I mean before you dropped asleep?"

"I heard the clock strike twelve. I know that I remained awake a little while after that, but I did not hear the clock again."

"When did consciousness return to you?"

"I think it was some time before daylight; but I also think—in fact, I know—that I was partially aroused when they were binding me, and forcing the gag into my mouth."

"Ah! that is better. Tell me what you remember about it."

"I cannot say that I really remember anything. It is all hazy, like a dream; and yet, I do, in that hazy way, recall some of the incidents, I am sure."

"Tell me what, no matter how hazy it may be."

"I heard voices. I dreamed that somebody was trying to pull my arms and my legs from my body."

"That was when they were tying you."

"And that I was in a dentist's chair, suffering the tortures of the damned in having my teeth filled."

"That was when they were putting the gag in your mouth."

"Yes, sir. I seemed to open my eyes, then, and to see the dentist who was at work upon me, and the strange part of it was that the dentist of my dream seemed to be a woman."

"A woman! Are you quite positive that you saw a woman?"

"Yes, I am; and also that I heard a woman's voice."

"And then——?"

"I think I must have opened my eyes, because I remember that something was thrown over them, so I could not see, and I heard the woman's voice say: 'We don't want him to know us the next time he sees us.'"

"Would you know that voice if you should hear it again?"

"No; it was all exactly like a dream. May I ask a question, Mr. Carter?"

"Certainly."

"Will you tell me how they did it? Will you tell me how they could get in here without waking me, and bind and gag me without bringing me once to my senses? I suppose they drugged me somehow, but how did they do it?"

"Simply enough, Joseph. You were chloroformed."

"But how? How?"

"The person who did that deed was sufficiently expert to open the outer door—the one which communicates with the hotel corridor—so silently that he did not disturb you or Ten-Ichi. He then closed the door between your room and the private hallway, leaving only a narrow crack, through which he sprayed chloroform into the room where you were sleeping.

"Of course, he could not drug you into perfect unconsciousness in that way, but he could make you sleep soundly enough so that he was enabled to step inside the room presently, and to hold a sponge saturated with the same drug over your nostrils and mouth."

"I begin to understand it all now."

"As soon as you were entirely unconscious, he gave his attention to Ten-Ichi, who was served in the same manner. Then, doubtless, he called whoever was with him, to his aid. It was a matter of minutes after that to bind and gag you both, and in doing so there was not the least fear of disturbing your master, whose room is at the other end of the apartment. I think, however, they did disturb him."

"You do?"

"Yes; I am convinced that he was aroused. I think he even started to come to this room of yours, for there are bruises on his body which indicate that there was a struggle."

"Do you think he fought with them?"

"I am sure of it. I think he met them in the narrow hallway—almost at the door of your room, and that he grappled with one of the intruders there. It was then that he was stabbed, for there are spots of blood—not much, to be sure, but enough to make my theory practically certain—in the hall just outside of your door."

"Then he was coming to our rescue."

"Certainly. He met and grappled with one of the assailants, in the hall, and, while they were struggling, the other, if there were two, and one of the others, if there were three, stabbed him in the back with the bowie knife. He was then picked up, carried to his own room and thrown upon his bed, face downward, as I found him. Ah! Here is the inspector."

Nick turned away from Joseph as Inspector McClusky entered the apartment, and together they went into the parlor and closed the door.

In as few words and as directly as possible, Nick related to him all that he had been able thus far to discover, and then he added:

"I think there were three persons here. There were three concerned in the murder. Clarence was stabbed from behind while he was struggling with one of them, and whoever it was he grappled with, is to-day carrying the marks of that short fight."

"How so? How do you mean?"

"There are blood marks on the ends of three of Morgan's fingers, on his right hand; and I found seven small particles of skin under the nails of the first, second and third fingers. It is evident to me that he had seized the person in front of him by the throat, and that when the bowie was driven into his back, the pain of it caused him to clinch his fingers with a spasmodic action which dug his nails into the flesh of his assailant."

"So there is somebody walking around to-day with has deep scratches on his neck; eh?"

"Just that."

"How do you suppose they entered the hotel without attracting attention?" asked the inspector.

"I think we will discover that they were already in the hotel," replied Nick, quietly.

"You mean that they were guests here?"

"Yes."

"Have you talked with the management yet?"

"Not at all. I waited for you to come."

"What else have you discovered, Nick?"

"Three long, golden hairs, for one thing. Two of them were clinging to Morgan's pajamas, and the other to the hand which had seized the person in front of him by the throat."

"That person was, then, a woman?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And——"

"Wait. I also found on the floor near the door of Joseph's room—this."

The detective exhibited a back-comb—an ivory comb in fact—and such a one as would be worn only by a woman with blond or golden hair.

"I have seen a comb exactly like that one, worn in the hair of Dan Derrington's sister, who was Morgan's wife and is now his widow," he said. "I feel that I ought to tell you this in order that we may begin straight."

"Great Scott! Do you think, then, that she was here?"

"I don't know. It would seem so, at first thought; but even if she were here, I do not believe that she was a willing party to the murder."

"Is there anything else?"

"Merely the bruises on Morgan's arms and body, showing that a struggle took place—and, to my mind, proving that it was a woman he grappled with."

"How so?"

"Because if it had been a man, the bruises would have been more severe, and because it would not have been deemed necessary, in that case, to have stabbed him in the back. It is evident to me that he was rapidly choking the woman into unconsciousness when he was stabbed. There was also a considerable swelling on the back of Morgan's head, showing that he was struck there after he had been thrown on the bed in his own room."

As Nick ceased speaking, he stepped across the room and touched the electric bell.

When it was answered, he summoned the night clerk, who presently appeared.

"You were on duty all of last night?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes, sir."

"Were you absent from your post at all during the night?"

"Not for a moment, sir."

"Did any person or persons who were unknown to you enter the hotel while you were on duty—at any hour at all?"

"No; not one."

"Could any person have entered without your knowledge?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you receive and room any new guests yesterday?"

"No, sir. All our apartments are taken. We could not take on a new guest now if we desired to do so."

"When was the last apartment taken?"

"More than a week ago—a week ago yesterday, in fact."

"Are there any other recent guests in the hotel?"

"No, none at all. All the others have been here for months."

"Who are these recent guests?"

"They are registered as Mr. and Mrs. Augustus St. Clair and Mr. George St. Clair. They occupy Apartment ninety-one."

"And they are here now?"

"Yes; certainly."

"Can you describe them? I feel some interest in their personality."

"Mr. Augustus St. Clair is tall and dark. He wears a full beard and walks with a limp. His hair is very long. His wife is a blond, and rather a handsome woman. She is a large woman, too. I should say that she would weigh close to two hundred. The brother would answer to the description I have given of the other man, save that he is not quite so tall, and is quite gray."

Nick turned to the inspector.

"The first one described might well be Derrington," he said.

"Derrington is in a cell at headquarters," replied the inspector.

"Not by several da—mill sites. You will find, later on, that the man in the cell at headquarters is Derrington's twin brother, who passes under the name of Covington; and I think also, if you should search further, that he is a fugitive from justice. This is only guesswork, inspector, but I think it will develop that I am right."

"So that is what you made out of the telegram from Lexington, eh?"

"Yes. It is the only way in which the extraordinary likeness can be explained."

"But even that does not explain the substitution of one man for the other, after the arrest."

"I think the substitution was made before the arrest."

"Ah!"

"I will explain another time. Just now, I want the clerk, if he will do so, to go in person to the rooms of these Mr. St. Clairs, and, on some pretext or other, to bring one or both of them here."

"Certainly, I will do that," replied the clerk.

He departed at once; but he was gone scarcely ten minutes ere he returned looking white and scared.

"They are not there. There is nobody there," he gasped.

"Just as I supposed," said Nick. "Did you go inside the rooms?"

"Yes."

"And what did you discover there?"

"Nothing. The beds have not been slept in. The rooms look as if they had merely walked out and expected at any moment to return."

"Do you recall having seen them, or any one of them, when they did go out?"

"No; but they might easily have left the hotel since it was opened this morning, without my noticing them. It is possible—"

"It is more than possible—it is extremely probable—that they took an early breakfast and went out through the dining room. You would not notice them, as you say, during the morning rush of business."

"No, sir; I would not."

"Come; let us go to their rooms," said Nick.

The apartment occupied by the St. Clairs was on the same floor with Morgan's, and the three men presently entered, closing the door behind them.

It was evident at a glance that they had carried nothing away with them; and also that they had brought very little of value into the hotel when they came.

There were a few articles of toilet on the dressers, and scattered elsewhere about the room, but these were of little value, and were such as might readily be left behind in a hasty departure. More than that, everything was new and cheap.

"There are their trunks," said the clerk, pointing to three huge affairs which had been deposited in one of the rooms.

By way of reply, the detective took his case of tools from his pocket, and with the folding, pocket "jimmy" which he always carried, quickly broke the clasp of the largest of the three trunks.

He threw back the lid, only to discover that the tray was packed with excelsior, and that, imbedded in that, were a score or more of bricks, to give it weight.

He removed the tray and deposited it on the floor, and

a glance told the two men who were looking on that the body of the trunk had been filled in the same manner.

A quick examination of the other trunks resulted in the discovery that they had been supplied with the necessary weight and compactness in the same manner.

"Your murderers lived in this apartment," said Nick, calmly. "One of them was Derrington himself, and the others were two of his fellow conspirators who have not before figured in his affairs—that is, we have not before encountered them. Doubtless, when we arrested Tabor and Talbot, we forced him to change his plans. Then he sent for these others, told them to come directly to this hotel."

"But they will be easily traced. I would know them instantly," exclaimed the clerk.

"Pardon me, but I doubt if you would recognize any one of them now," said Nick. "They were evidently thoroughly disguised when they came here. They knew the game they were playing, and you may rest assured that they took complete measures to avoid being identified later on."

"And your fellow Covington—or Derrington—whichever he is, at the Waldorf, will meet you as boldly to-day as he did yesterday," said the inspector.

"Sure. We haven't a ghost of evidence against him, and you can bet your last dollar that he has a perfect alibi for every hour of the last twenty-four. I am in the position of knowing pretty nearly who the murderer is without being able to prove it. Only, inspector, I do not think it was Derrington who used the bowie knife."

"Why not? It might have been he as well as the other."

"No; I do not think it was any part of Derrington's plans to kill Morgan in that manner, and if you had been present at the commission of the crime, I think you would have seen that he was frightfully angry because it was done. It must upset all his plans. If they had found Morgan asleep, and could have worked without interruption, Derrington would have compassed his death in some apparently natural way, so that it would have appeared that he had died as the result of an accident. Doubtless they would have turned on the gas, or have done something of the kind, and then returned to Joseph's room, released their two prisoners there, and have gone on about their business. George, do you know what I have a good mind to do?"

"No. What?"

"Wait twenty-four hours longer, and I'll show you!"

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER MAKES A NEW MOVE.

The whole city rang with the terrible news of the murder of Clarence Morgan.

By noon, extras were out describing the crime in detail—or in as much detail as could be gleaned by the reporters, and it was soon after twelve o'clock that day when Nick Carter, dressed in the same costume he had worn when, in company with Clarence Morgan, he had first encountered the man who called himself Covington, but whom the detective was convinced was Derrington, at the Waldorf, entered that hotel and proceeding to the billiard room, threaded his way among the tables until he presently seated himself in the same place that he had occupied on that other occasion.

He was there to see Covington, as we must continue to call him for the present, in order to avoid confusion of identity.

"He is sure to be about here somewhere," mused the detective, "and unless I greatly mistake the character of the man, he will approach me the moment he discovers me here. That is part of his game. And when he appears, Chick will not be far off, and if only Chick has not lost sight of him since he was put on the track—well!"

Nick was not mistaken.

He had not occupied the chair half an hour before he saw his man as he approached from behind the screen which shut off a view from the barroom.

It was evident, too, that he saw Nick at the same time, for even from that distance he waved his hand, bowed and smiled, and Nick saw that in his other hand he was carrying one of the extras which described the murder.

The detective nodded in response to the greeting, and then turned his eyes away as if he had no further interest in the man; but it was only a moment before he heard that deep, soft voice speaking to him over his shoulder.

"What a terrible crime!" he said. "Is it not dreadful, Mr. Parsons?"

It will be remembered that on the former occasion Nick had given his own name as Parsons.

"Horrible!" replied Nick.

"And is the victim of it not the same gentleman whom I met here, at this very table, with you?" continued Covington, dropping into the seat opposite Nick.

"Yes; the same."

"He was your friend?"

"One of my best friends. I loved him dearly."

"The event must be a terrible blow—an awful shock to you, sir."

"It is," replied Nick, shortly.

"Will you have a drink, Mr. Parsons?"

"No—thank you all the same."

"Ah! You don't mind if I indulge?"

"Not at all."

"Tell me, is there any clew to the murderer?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. I don't really know. You see I am so knocked out by the—— Let us change the subject."

"With all my heart. I was on the point of asking you

you had—er—seen my double since the time you mis-
ok me for the outlaw?"

"I have discovered that he is still there, in prison," re-
ed Nick.

"Is the resemblance really as remarkable as you
ted?"

"Quite so. I should say that you were twin brothers."

"I am happy to say that I have no brothers at all; in
t, no relatives, even. I am all alone in the world."

Nick turned so that he exactly faced the man opposite
n. Then he placed his elbows on the table and rested
chin upon his two hands, while he gazed with unflinch-
eyes into the face of his *vis-à-vis*.

"Mr. Covington," he said, slowly, and with studied de-
eration. "I suppose it is known to you that I am a
ective?"

Really? Are you? No; I did not know it."

The reply was as deliberate as his own speech, but,
ertheless, Nick knew that the man opposite him lied.
wever, he kept on in the same strain—in the manner
had resolved to continue to the end.

He had determined to adopt an entirely new course
him—one which he had never in all his experience
d before—but he had his own reasons for considering
he best policy in the present case, although he doubted
ny one of his detective friends would have approved of

I am Nick Carter," continued Nick, in the same tone
manner, knowing that the man before him was al-
ly aware of the truth of the announcement.

Indeed! I have heard of you, Mr. Carter; and may
onfess that I feel greatly honored to make your ac-
intance?"

I have telegraphed to Lexington since I met you here
re," said Nick, in the same steady and uncompromis-
tone.

Yes?" Covington yawned. "And what did you dis-
er?"

I discovered enough," said Nick, slowly, and with
eyes still fixed upon his companion, "to convince me
Covington is not your true name any more than
ons is mine."

ovington started to his feet with an exclamation of
-feigned anger, but before he could take a step to
e the vicinity of the table, he was arrested by the
clear and sharply enunciated words of the detective
h followed.

Sit down, Mr. Covington," he said. "I am compelled
equest you to listen to all that I have to say to you,
you may as well know at once that I came here for
express purpose of saying it."

will not listen to your——"

You will listen, sir. If you refuse, I shall arrest you
ce and take you to police headquarters, where you
be compelled to listen. Take your choice."

Covington sank back into his chair.

But he shrugged his shoulders, and assumed an air of utter boredom; and he did it so well that the detective could not help admiring his cool effrontery, and his entire boldness.

It was plain that the detective had to deal with no ordinary person, in this man who confronted him across the table.

"You have me at a disadvantage, sir," he said. "You are an officer, and you therefore exert a temporary power against which I cannot struggle, and which gives you, for the moment, an opportunity to insult me with impunity. But I trust that you understand that it is only temporary, and that there will come a time of reckoning."

"Oh, yes. I understand that thoroughly; and also that the reckoning will come."

"Would you mind making this interview as short as possible?"

"I shall not hasten it or abridge it. You will have to listen to me to the end."

"Well, go on, then, for Heaven's sake. You bore me dreadfully, Mr. Carter, although you may not realize it."

"I think that I understand perfectly the effect which my words and my manner have upon you. You have in your pocket, at this moment, a box of Mexican cerillos—double-ended wax matches, in other words. Will you let me see it for a moment?"

"No."

"Ah, well, it doesn't matter. I saw you use it the other day, and I advise you not to part with it; it may be required, later on."

"By whom, pray?"

"By the inspector, or the coroner, or some officer interested in discovering the murderers of Clarence Morgan."

"And why?"

"Because I found such a match, which had been burned only at one end, in rather a remarkable place. It is possible that it did not drop from your box when you opened it—or it is possible that it did. You are not known to have been where that match was found, but I must assure you that Mexican cerillos are not at all common in New York."

Covington shrugged his shoulders.

"Really, Carter," he said, "if you are trying to make yourself interesting, you are a dismal failure."

"Failure in the beginning is often a precursor of success, Mr. Covington. You see, I still so address you, although I am convinced that it is not your right name. I have no doubt that I shall become extremely interesting before I have done."

"If you ever do get done; eh?"

"Will you let me see your box of cerillos?"

"No."

"Then let me advise you again not to part with it—

if you are innocent. But if you are guilty, throw it away, by all means."

"Innocent of what? Guilty of what?"

"Of murder."

Again Covington leaped to his feet.

"I will not bear this sort of talk!" he exclaimed.

"Sit down, Mr. Covington, or I will not hesitate to carry out my threat. It is possible that you may avoid immediate arrest, if you are patient."

"I will call the manager of the hotel. He will not permit a guest to be insulted in this manner."

"All right, call him. He knows me. I will tell him that you are not Covington. I will tell him that your real name is Derrington, and that you are a twin brother of the outlaw who—we will say—has lately been a patron here, and I will add that you are the real Derrington who was here. I will tell him that your brother is a fugitive from justice who has hidden himself in Lexington, Kentucky, for several years, under the name of Covington. I will tell him that your brother attended a supper given by Clarence Morgan, some time ago, in your name, and that there he attempted to poison Mr. Morgan. I will tell him that your brother was arrested in your place, and that he is now in prison while you are still at large. I will tell him that you are both Derringtons, sons of the Denver gambler, Dan Derrington. Call him."

Nick had watched the face of the man before him narrowly while he was making the foregoing statement, but not a line or an expression of it changed in the slightest degree.

Covington retained the supercilious smile which was half a sneer; he even yawned, while the detective was speaking. Twice he shrugged his shoulders; and when Nick ceased his remarks, he drawled:

"Really, Mr. Detective, you should have been a novelist, you are so good at romancing."

"Possibly."

"Rest assured that when the time comes for me to prove my antecedents—if it should ever come—I will have no difficulty in doing so. May I ask if you mean to charge me with the actual murder of your friend?"

"If by the term actual murder you mean, to charge you with being the one who stuck the bowie knife into his back, in the hallway of his apartment, I will answer no. I do not believe you did that. That act did not accord with your plans and designs."

"Really. What, then, do you charge against me?"

"That you were there. That when Clarence Morgan rushed through the hall and grappled with the woman, it was your other associate who struck him with the knife. You intended to murder Morgan, but not precisely in that manner."

"What an utter ass you are, Mr. Carter! Have you made this up out of whole cloth, or did you dream it?"

For the first time since the interview began, the detective took his eyes for a moment away from Covington's face; and as he did so, he saw, at the other side of the room, his assistant, Chick.

Without hesitation, he raised his hand and motioned Chick to join them.

"Sit down, Chick," he said. And then: "Mr. Covington, this is one of my assistants. Have you happened to notice him before?"

Covington sneered.

"Yes," he replied. "He is the man who has been following me like a shadow, since yesterday. He changed his appearance several times, but he has done so poorly that I had no difficulty——"

He paused suddenly, and Nick openly smiled.

"That was a bad break for you, Mr. Covington," he said. "If you were as innocent as you would have it appear, as free from all guile as you pretend to be, you would never have been looking behind you for shadows. However, you are correct. He has been shadowing you."

Chick stared at his chief in surprise. He did not understand this new game.

In all his experience he had never before known Carter to show his hand as he was doing now.

"I want you to answer, plainly, each question I shall ask you, Chick," said the detective. "Do it without regard to the presence of Mr. Covington."

"Very well, sir."

"Where did he pass the time between the hour of midnight and daylight, last past?"

"I don't know. He got away from me."

Covington laughed aloud.

"So much for your distinguished assistant!" he exclaimed.

"Wait," said Nick. "I expected that answer, for if you had not been sure that you had lost your shadow you would scarcely have dared to carry out your plans to the end. We have not done yet, and perhaps I shall surprise you by filling in some of the gaps. Now, Chick."

"Yes."

"Where did you lose him?"

"At the Hotel Astor."

"How did you lose him?"

"He entered the hotel about nine o'clock last night. He went to the bar and ordered a drink. I did the same; in fact, I stood next to him."

"A fact, Carter, of which I was perfectly aware," interpolated Covington.

"I have no doubt of it," replied Nick, dryly. "Go on, Chick."

"After the drink, he passed through the hotel lobby and entered one of the telephone booths at the north end of the building."

"Correct," said Covington, smiling. "Really, you are quite expert, Mr. Chicklet."

"And then?" asked Nick.

e came out and took one of the elevators. I did the
"
d you take the same elevator?"
es. He got off at the fourth floor, and I did like-
"
n't you think, Chicklet, that you were following
ather closely, if you intended to avoid discovery in
occupation?" asked Covington, with a grin.
n the contrary, I knew that you had already dis-
ed me. I knew that you knew I was following you.
ant to discover what room you entered and when
ame out of it."
ut you did not succeed in that?"
o."
ick turned again to Nick, and continued:
passing through the hotel office, he stopped an in-
at the desk. He said something to the clerk, but I
not hear what it was. I was simple enough to sup-
that he was not known at that hotel."
ut you discovered very soon what it was I said there;
asked Covington.
es. You had told the clerk that I was following
I don't know what else he said, Nick, but the hotel
tive—he is a new one, whom I did not know—got
he same elevator, and when we stepped off at the
floor, he stopped me."
understand," said Nick. "You should have been
vide awake to be handled like that, lad."
know it. It required only a moment for me to ex-
to the hotel detective who I was and what I was,
in the meantime, this fellow had turned through an-
corridor and disappeared."
o you did not know what room he entered?"
e got away from me. I don't know where he went
hat he did. I only know that I lost him."
hen did you next see him?"
hortly after eight o'clock this morning."
here?"
t the entrance to this hotel."
hich entrance?"
stor Court."
hat happened then?"
had changed my disguise, and he did not know me."
hat is not precisely true," drawled Covington; "but
pass."
hat did he do then?"
e went directly to his room."
ow, where had you been during the time that had
ed since you lost him in the Hotel Astor, and the
ent when he entered this hotel by the Astor Court
nce?"
ere; waiting for him."
ou mean that you were here in this hotel?"
es."
o you know if he occupied his room last night?"

"I know that he did not."

"Very good," said Nick. "And now, Mr. Covington, will you be good enough to tell us where you passed the time which is unaccounted for by my assistant?"

"No; why should I?"

"It might simplify matters by enabling me to look up your alibi without delay. However, that is not as important as another thing I wish you to do."

"What is that?"

"I wish you to go at once with me to the Hotel Mammoth."

"Where is that?"

"Ah! Another bad break. It is the place where the murder was committed."

"You wish me to go there?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I wish you to look upon the body of the murdered man; but, more than that, I wish to give certain persons there an opportunity to have a look at you."

"Great Scott, Mr. Detective, don't you think you are carrying this farce too far? I do, and I warn you that I am almost at the end of my patience."

"I think," said Nick, slowly, "that I shall require you to go there with me."

"Force me, do you mean? I hardly think you can do that, sir."

"I can give you the choice of the alternative."

"Bah! You make me tired. You give me a pain."

"It is go there, or go to headquarters. You will not care to be arrested for murder, even if you are fortunate enough to be released again within a few hours, will you?"

"I think I would be willing to undergo almost anything rather than another hour of your society."

"That is rather impolite. Will you go with me, now, to the Hotel Mammoth?"

"No! I'm damned if I will."

"Chick," said the detective, quietly, "oblige me by asking the hotel detective to come here a moment. At the same time, order a closed carriage around to the Astor Court door. When that is done, you might telephone to Inspector McClusky and tell him that I have arrested the murderer of Clarence Morgan, and that I am bringing him to headquarters. Hurry, now. We will wait for you here."

Covington leaped to his feet.

"By Heaven, Carter!" he exclaimed, while his eyes gleamed dangerously. "You go too far! If you think I will submit to this sort of thing, you are greatly mistaken, for I will not. You have not the shadow of proof to substantiate your assertions, and you know them to be preposterous. You can go to blazes, you and your assistant! I shall not wait for——"

"If you move a step to leave this room," said Nick, quietly, but firmly, "I will find a way to bring you to terms, and in a manner which will be very little to your liking. You have got to do one of two things; you must go with me to the Mammoth, or you must suffer arrest for murder, and go to police headquarters. I mean it. I am not joking. I'll take you to one place or the other, if I have to take you in pieces. Now, sit down and wait, for if you did but know it, I'm losing my patience, too. Sit down, I say!"

Covington resumed his seat.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DETECTIVE'S LITTLE GAME OF BLUFF.

"Am I to consider myself under arrest?" asked Covington, as he dropped back into the chair opposite Nick Carter.

"That is a question which you may answer for yourself," replied the detective, calmly. "If you decline to go with me to the Mammoth, as I have requested you to do, then you are under arrest, and I shall take you, willing or not, to the office of Inspector McClusky."

"And if I do consent to go with you to the hotel in question—what then?"

"Why, then you may go your own way as soon as I have done with you there."

"Do I understand that you will not arrest me to-day, if I do go with you?"

"I place no limit upon the duration of your freedom, but, as I have already said, you will be permitted to leave the hotel as you please. I shall place no restrictions upon you."

"Very well, I will go."

"That is a very sensible decision."

"I wish you would tell me why you wish to take me there."

"That will be developed when we get there. Here comes Chick with the detective. Do you wish me to explain to him why we sent for him, or do you prefer to do it yourself?"

"I don't see that that makes any difference," replied Covington, with a shrug.

"Then I will leave you to do it while I have a word with my assistant."

Nick called Chick aside then, but paused when they were a few feet from the table where Covington and the hotel detective were now seated together; and he smiled when he saw how eagerly the outlaw began his explanation of the affair. He felt that he knew already what sort of version he would put on the business; but Nick knew that he was himself too well known at the hotel to be misjudged or misunderstood by the management.

"Chick," he said, in an undertone, "he has consented to go to the Mammoth with me."

"I would like to know——" began Chick.

"Never mind what you would like to know; it is wha I wish you to do that is important just now."

"And what is that?"

"This fellow will be absent from the Waldorf about two hours at the least, and I want you, while he is away, to thoroughly search his room and his effects. I will speak to the hotel detective before we leave, so that he can get the consent of the management, and he can be present while you are making the search."

"Very good."

"Don't leave a thing unexamined. Search in his trunks for false bottoms. Go through everything, and do it thoroughly."

"It shall be done."

"You know, of course, that my talk about taking him to the central office was all a bluff, for I haven't a particle of evidence against him—not enough to make a peg to hang your hat on; all the same, if he had forced my hand, I am not sure but that I should have risked it."

"I never knew you to take just this course befor Nick."

"I never did. But this case is in a tangle. He ha played his game so smoothly that I have got to force hin to lead trumps. Don't you see? If matters remained as they are, we might be, Heaven only knows how lon in getting evidence against him. By showing him th cards I hold, I have given him the impression that I've got a lot more of them up my sleeve which he hasn seen because I did not care to show them. I've got him on the run, now, and unless I am awfully mistaken in m man, he will do something, and that mighty soon, to giv himself away."

"I see the point."

"Search his rooms, and see what you find there. may be that you will discover nothing at all. It is even likely that you will not, for he is so slick that he would not be apt to leave anything that is incriminating, in his rooms."

"What are you going to do at the Mammoth? It wor feaze him a bit to make him look at Morgan's corpse."

"I know that. He thinks that is what I intend to d but it is not."

"What, then?"

"I want that night clerk to have a good look at hin I wish to see if there is any possibility of identifying him with Mr. Augustus St. Clair."

"Or George St. Clair. He might be either one."

"Yes; but even that is not the real object. My cl aim is to know that he is absent from this hotel l enough for you to make a thorough search of his effect

The detective turned back to the table where the other were seated.

"Well," he said to the hotel detective, "has Mr. Cov-

ington explained to you the substance of the conversation we have just held together?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think that he does well to consent to take that little ride with me?"

"I was just telling him that I do."

"Now, if you will step here a moment, I would like to have one word with you."

They walked off together to the spot where Nick had talked with his assistant.

"While Covington is away," he said, abruptly, "I want his rooms and his effects searched with great thoroughness. I have given Chick my instructions, and I want you to secure the consent of the management, and then assist Chick. Will you do it?"

"Don't you think it is rather a high-handed proceeding, under the circumstances, Mr. Carter?"

"No; and for the reason that I am positive about where I stand. Bob, notwithstanding the fact that the inspector telephoned to you that Dan Derrington is still an inmate of a cell at police headquarters, and notwithstanding the added fact that the chief of police of Lexington has telegraphed that Charles Jameson Covington is well known in his section, that man who is sitting there at the table with Chick at this moment is Dan Derrington—is the very man who registered at this hotel more than two weeks ago, and the one whom we thought we arrested at Morgan's rooms in the Mammoth at the time the effort was made to poison him."

"By thunder, Mr. Carter, are you positive about that?"

"As positive as I am that you are standing in front of me at this moment."

"Then I'll do it. I'll talk to the management, and we will search his rooms."

"Thank you, Bob."

"You won't let him come back and catch us at it?"

"I'll give you full two hours. You should be able to do it in much less time than that, don't you think?"

"Sure."

"Chick is an expert at this sort of thing. He will do the act so well that there will not be a trace of his presence remaining, when he is through."

"Then consider it done."

"All right; now another thing."

"Well?"

"After I have taken him to the Mammoth, I intend to set him at liberty again, no matter what may happen there. He will, of course, return to the Waldorf."

"He may not. He might take it into his head to skip out."

"I don't think so. Whatever the man may be, he is certainly no coward, and no crawler. He has got grit enough and nerve enough to take him through almost anything. He'll return here all right, even if he decides that it is best for him to get out as soon as possible afterward."

"All right. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to treat him just as if you believed his story and took sides with him, against me. Lead him to think that you have been to headquarters yourself, to see the man who is imprisoned there. You can suggest that I sent you there, if you like. But give him the impression that you have seen the other man, and that you thoroughly believe this to be a case of mistaken identity."

"All right. I will do that."

"That is all."

"Shall you return here with him?"

"No; but I won't be far behind. I'll wear a carnation on the right side of my coat instead of the customary left side, so that you will know me."

"Ah! You intend to shadow him yourself, after this, eh?"

"For the present—yes."

Nick returned to the table.

"Now, Mr. Covington," he said, "our carriage is at door—the Astor Court door. Are you ready?"

"Quite; but there is one thing I would like to do before we start, and since I am not under arrest," he sneered, "there would seem to be no reason why I should not do it."

"Certainly not, if we are not delayed too long."

"I had made an engagement which you force me to break. I wish you to step with me to the telephone booth; that is all."

The detective could make no objection to such a natural request, and accordingly he accompanied Covington to the booth.

He gave the operator the number of the connection he desired in a loud tone, so that Nick heard it plainly, and after a moment he entered the booth assigned to him.

Three minutes later, he came out again, and he was smiling; and somehow, there was something in that smile and in the glance which accompanied it, which made Nick wonder for an instant if he had done well to consent so readily to that telephonic message.

But he was destined to discover, to his cost, what that message portended, as we shall see.

"I am ready now," said Covington. "Do we ride alone together?"

"Yes," replied Nick.

"I wonder that you dare to do that, since you charge me with being a murderer. Aren't you afraid that I may try to stick a bowie knife into your back?"

"Not at all, I assure you. If you are thinking of indulging in any such pastime, you will have ample opportunity to test your skill. Come on."

Covington was still smiling when they left the hotel and entered the carriage that was awaiting them at the Astor Court door.

CHAPTER VII.

TRAILING A VILLAIN'S IDENTITY.

The ride to the Hotel Mammoth was uneventful.

As if by common consent, both men in the carriage were content to remain silent, and from the moment they entered the vehicle until it drew up at the door of the great apartment house, neither of them addressed a word to the other.

"Would you like to have the carriage wait for you?" asked Nick, as they got down.

"No; I think I shall prefer to walk. The fact is, I have breathed the same air with you so long, Carter, that I think a little exercise and a little of the ozone of the park will do me good—after I am rid of you."

"Very good; only don't congratulate yourself that you are rid of me."

"Our agreement——"

"Oh, I remember the terms of our agreement perfectly well. I shall hold to them—and I shall also cling to you tighter than a brother, until I land you where you belong."

"And now what?" asked Covington, as Nick paused for a moment in the office.

"You will know presently," replied Nick; and then he addressed the clerk who was on duty at the desk.

"I want Mr. Seaman, the night clerk," he said. "Please send him to me at once, and tell him that I will be waiting at the elevator on the fourth floor."

They entered the elevator then, and fifteen minutes later Seaman joined them.

He bowed to Nick, whom he instantly recognized, of course, and stared in surprise at Covington; but Nick, without a word of explanation, led the way around the corridor to the door of Apartment 91.

"Have you the key to this door with you?" he asked of the clerk.

"No; I did not understand that you wished for it. I——"

"Never mind. I will open the door."

He did so very quickly with his picklock, to the utter amazement of the clerk; and then the three entered the room together.

"Mr. Seaman," said Nick, as soon as they were inside and the door was closed behind them, "do you recall ever having seen this man before?"

"Why, yes, sir; I think so. He came here to a supper in Mr. Morgan's rooms the night—— "

"No," interrupted Nick. "That man is now in the tombs. This one merely resembles him; but does this man remind you of any person whom you have seen quite recently—as late as yesterday, in fact?"

"No, sir; I can't say that he does."

The detective produced a wig of rather long hair and a false beard from one of his pockets, and silently extended them toward Covington.

"Will you oblige me by removing your hat and putting these on for a moment?" he said. "I wish to discover if they do not make you resemble a certain Mr. Augustus St. Clair, who lately occupied this apartment. I have made them as nearly as possible like the ones described to me as worn by him. Will you put them on, Covington?"

"Certainly I will not do anything of the kind. You have made about seven different kinds of a fool of me already, Carter, and I am at about the end of my rope, as far as humoring you goes."

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"I expected you to refuse," he said; and then he made a pretense of returning them to his pocket, although he dropped them to the floor instead.

As he stooped to pick them up, he stepped quickly behind Covington, and seized him by his arms, just above the elbows. Then he drew them back so that he held his man perfectly helpless, and it was all done so quickly that Covington had not an opportunity to resist.

Nick Carter's great strength stood him in good stead at that moment, for he speedily discovered that the man he had seized was also unusually powerful; but he had him at a decided disadvantage, and he held him helpless.

"Now, Seaman," he said, "put that wig and beard on his head and face, and see if he looks like St. Clair. If he makes any effort to kick you, kick back. I reckon you have the advantage."

"Curse you, Carter!" exclaimed Covington. "I'll make you pay for all this, and that before you are many hours older, too!"

"Go ahead, Seaman," said Nick, without paying the slightest attention to Covington's curses, which were now coming thick and fast.

Seaman hesitated for an instant, but Nick repeated his request, and this time in a decidedly peremptory tone, and he obeyed.

Covington, perceiving that there was no help for it, stood quite still while Seaman adjusted the wig and beard, and stepped back to view the effect; and after he had stood there for a moment, Nick released his hold, and stepped back again.

"Now, Covington," he said, "if you will walk lame——"

Covington wheeled like lightning, and his fist shot out, straight for Nick Carter's face; but it hit only the empty air, for Nick threw his head to one side with the quickest of dodges, and the outlaw's fist did not touch him.

Then Nick leaped back out of his reach.

"I might have knocked you into a cocked hat, if I had cared to do so," he said, calmly, "only I do not care to spoil your beauty just at present; but don't try that act again, if you please. Now, Seaman, did he look like St. Clair?"

"I can positively say that he did, sir."

"Very good. That will do. Have the undertakers completed their duties in Mr. Morgan's apartment?"

"Yes."

"Then we will go there; or no. I will ask you, Seaman, to go there and bring Joseph here. Tell him that I will detain him only a moment."

As Seaman left the room Nick saw, in the mirror over the mantel, that Covington was slowly moving his hand toward his hip pocket, and he wheeled suddenly and pointed one of his revolvers straight between the outlaw's eyes.

"None of that," he said, sternly. "I shall keep to the letter of my contract, and you will be permitted to take your departure presently. I know that you have a gun on you—possibly two of them, but your own good sense will tell you that this is no place to make use of them; and here is Joseph."

The features of Clarence Morgan's valet plainly showed the suffering he had undergone because of the murder of his master; but he was calm and dignified, as usual.

"Joseph," said Nick, "I want you to come to me when your duties are finished here. I want you in my employ." Then he turned to Covington.

"Do you remember ever having seen Joseph before?" he asked him.

"No. I never saw him before in my life."

"Thank you," said Nick, smiling. "That is all, Joseph. You may return to your own room now."

But the detective followed him into the hallway, and there he asked:

"Well, Joseph, what about his voice, eh?"

"This, sir: I could swear it is the same I heard talking with the woman when they gagged me and tied me to the bed."

"Thank you. That is what I supposed. It is not an ordinary voice at all, and he has the faculty of altering it at will, but he did not think it necessary just now."

Returning to the room, he said to Covington:

"I believe that is all for the present. I shall not trouble you more until—until I arrest you finally for the murder of Clarence Morgan. There is the door. You are at liberty to pass through it and begone as quickly as you wish."

Covington's eyes were blazing, his lips were tightened over his teeth and his nostrils were dilated, but he controlled himself with a visible effort, and, turning on his heel, he left the room.

It was not the intention of the detective to follow him at once, but something impelled him to do so, and it was well that he did, for at the moment he entered the hall through the door, a woman, shrouded in a heavy crepe veil, was in the act of passing it, and he saw her start back with a little cry of fright, and also he saw Covington, when the cry was uttered, make a move as if he were on the point of leaping forward and seizing her.

But she, remembering, doubtless, that she was veiled beyond the possibility of recognition, passed on instantly, while Covington, after that first motion, turned quickly in the opposite direction, and walked rapidly along the hall until he turned the corner toward the elevator.

"Keep an eye on him, Seaman, until I return—until I overtake you," said Nick, quickly; and then he darted away after the woman.

He overtook her just as she was in the act of ringing the bell at the door of Clarence Morgan's apartment.

"Mrs. Morgan," he said, in a low tone, "wait!"

She turned like a flash and confronted him.

"I am Nick Carter," he said, calmly. "I was Clar-

ence's friend. I am your friend, if you will let me be so. See! I will prove it."

He rang the bell himself as he spoke, and at the same time continued talking.

"When Joseph comes, I shall place you in his care. I wish you would promise me that you will remain here in this hotel until I return, or if you are compelled to go away, leave your address with Joseph for me. I have not time to wait now. Will you do one or the other of the things I have asked?"

"Yes," she replied, in a low tone.

"Thank you. Was that your brother Dan, whom you just met in the hall?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you have another brother who lives under the name of—what is it?"

"Covington."

"Exactly. Thank you. Don't forget. I rely upon you. I believe in you. Here is Joseph."

When the door was opened, he continued:

"Joseph, this lady was very dear to Mr. Morgan, and he was very dear to her. I wish you to show her every consideration in your power."

He turned away then, before the valet could reply, and was gone; but instead of hastening to the elevator after Covington, he ran rapidly back to ninety-one, and in another moment was making rapid changes in his appearance.

Five minutes later he descended in the elevator, but not a soul who had seen him enter the hotel, recognized him when he passed out of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S TERRIBLE TEST.

The detective found Seaman standing on the steps of the hotel seemingly absorbed in the destruction of a toothpick, which he was chewing savagely.

"Well?" asked Nick, coming up silently behind him and startling him considerably.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Seaman.

Nick laughed, and Seaman understood.

"Where is he?" asked the detective.

"Over there in the park. He has just passed under that big oak. He will reappear in a moment, just below it. He is walking very slowly," was the reply.

"All right. I'll come back here sometime to-day if possible. If not, I will telephone you. There is a lady now in Morgan's rooms. I placed her in Joseph's care. Show her every consideration if Joseph should ask it of you."

"I will, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you."

Nick hurried away then.

He crossed the avenue and entered the park, making his way rapidly along until he came in sight of Covington, who was walking very slowly, and, to judge by appearances, was overwhelmed in thought.

The detective purposely retained his own position far in the rear, so that if necessary he could at any moment leap to one side and avoid being discovered if the man he was following should turn.

But either he had no idea that he was pursued, or he did not care if he was, for he did not once turn around to look behind him.

Instead, he made his way slowly toward the very center of the park, and presently turned through an unfrequented path which leads to the wooded hill, at about Ninetieth Street.

It occurred to Nick then that possibly Covington was leading him into an ambush of some sort, so he kept himself thoroughly on the alert, fearing nothing, and confident that he was able to cope with any difficulty which might arise.

But he had not reckoned upon the fund of resource possessed by the man he was pursuing.

At the opposite side of the hill, the path described turns, and it becomes necessary for pedestrians to follow the driveway for a distance of thirty rods or more in crossing it.

Covington had already passed across, and was in the pathway on the opposite side, when Nick entered upon the driveway, and he hastened forward just as a splendidly appointed equipage came around a bend in the roadway, the horses trotting rapidly.

There was a coachman and a footman on the box, and had Nick been nearer to Covington, he would have discovered that he made an almost imperceptible signal to them as they drove past.

It was accomplished merely by raising his hat and scratching his head, but Nick would have noticed it, and doubtless have understood it, had he been looking; but it so happened that his eyes were at that moment directed toward the carriage.

He stepped to one side to permit it to pass, at the same moment turning his eyes again toward the man he was following, and therefore he did not see that the man who appeared to be the footman of the equipage rose to his feet the instant the carriage passed Nick Carter.

As he did so, he twirled something in the air over his head, and at the same instant a huge loop shot forward like a long snake, and fell, true to its aim, fairly over the detective's shoulders.

There was a sudden jerk and a terrible jar as Nick struck the earth. He was dragged thirty or forty feet along the frozen roadway before the horses could be brought to a standstill, and then, as he sought to leap to his feet, he received a blow upon his head from the driver, who had jumped from the box as soon as the lasso was thrown, and he sank back, utterly unconscious.

It was the work of seconds only for his assailants to seize him and convey him to the carriage, where he was roughly thrown inside; and then, panting with the exertion of running, Covington—or as we shall henceforth call him—Derrington—appeared on the scene, and sprang into the vehicle beside his captive.

The horses were whipped into a rapid trot again, so that when, a moment later, it passed a mounted policeman, he saw nothing unusual in its appearance, and merely shouted to the driver:

"Careful! Not too fast!"

Inside the carriage a strange scene was taking place.

Derrington, for a moment, gave fiendish expression to his insensate rage, for he struck the unconscious detective several times in the face with his clinched fist.

"Curse you!" he muttered. "Curse you! You have ruined all my chances of success. You have spoiled all my plans, and I have used up three years in perfecting them. You have ruined me—ruined me!

"You would electrocute me, or hang me for a murderer, would you, you cur? But by all the thunders, I will hang you first!"

He did not stop to consider that he was talking to an unconscious man, who could not hear a word he uttered. He seemed to take especial delight in jeering at the insensible form before him.

"You did not dream how easily I could lay a trap for you, when you let me use the telephone, did you, you hound? I knew mighty well that you would follow me when I left the Mammoth. I knew that I could lead you through this place, and I knew that my two cowboys could rope you as you were passing. You're not used to that sort of thing in Central Park, New York, are you?

"Oh, I'll fix you, Carter! I'll fix you! You spoiled my game, but I will take it out of you!"

He desisted then, and busied himself with gagging and binding his captive, and he did it with skill and thoroughness.

But he need not have taken the trouble, for the detective was still unconscious when the carriage finally stopped.

It had been driven inside a stable far over on the east side of the city, in the vicinity of Forty-second Street; and the moment it passed through the doors, they were closed.

Derrington opened the carriage door and leaped to the stable floor.

"He's coming to now, boys," he said to his companions. "Bring him upstairs. I shall not bother with him long. His shift of life is a short one now, for, by Heaven! I will see the end of him, if I never accomplish another thing as long as I live—and maybe, with him out of the way, I will be able to win out yet."

Derrington's followers obeyed him without a word in reply.

They dragged Nick from the interior of the carriage to the floor, and perceiving that his eyes were open and that he was now conscious, they handled him all the more roughly.

"Got your eyes open, have you?" jeered Derrington. "Well, you had better make the most of it, for they will be closed forever before you are many minutes older. Minutes, not hours—do you understand that?"

Nick made no reply. He knew that it was useless to do so.

"Bring him along, boys. Fancher, did you attend to that rope business?"

"Sure!"

"Got it all fixed?"

"You bet! Everything is ready."

A stationary ladder led to the loft of the stable, and Nick was thrust unceremoniously from hand to hand through the trapdoor with which it communicated.

He was unable to stand upon his feet, for they were bound together, and his hands were also bound tightly

behind his back. The gag had been taken from his mouth as soon as he was dragged from the carriage.

The stable was an old one, made of wood. Heavy beams crossed the loft from plate to plate, under the rafters, and to one of these beams a rope with a hangman's noose at the end of it had been suspended.

"Do you see that rope?" asked Derrington, with a cruel smile on his face. "That is for you, you cur!"

Nick made no reply. In fact, he gave no sign whatever that he heard, for he knew it was utterly useless to do so. Derrington continued his jeering.

"It has been your business, all your life, to bring men to the electric chair, and to the gallows, so I'm going to give you a little taste of it yourself," he said. "I'm going to hang you, Carter. Hang you until you are dead. I'll give you a taste of your own medicine, for once in your life. How do you like it?"

Nick was silent.

"Mum, are you? All right. I didn't expect you to howl for mercy. You're too gritty for that, and you know you wouldn't get it if you asked for it. You have ruined me, and now I'll ruin you.

"You were right, Carter, about that twin-brother business. Ben shot a man out in Denver, and he had to skip. That was when he went to Kentucky. It was a happy thought of mine, sending him to that supper in my place, wasn't it? He didn't like it much, though, afterward. But he won't squeal. Ben never squeals; and I'll get him out all right after you are dead.

"You were right, too, about that Morgan affair. It was Fancher, there, who stuck the bowie into him. He was choking the life out of Fancher's wife—she used to be Miss Pearson, when you knew her—so you couldn't blame him; eh? Fancher and I used to ride the roads together, and we're going back to ride them again, now that you have spoiled this game of ours here. I'll find my sister, too, Carter, and I'll make her look out for that dower from Morgan, for she is truly his wife. Oh, I saw her to-day at the hotel, and I suppose you did, also."

He turned away then, and examined the rope with great care.

"It will do finely, Carter," he said, as he placed a chair under it. "The rope is strong and the noose is well made. I'm going to let it choke you to death slowly, so that you may enjoy all the agonies of slow hanging. We'll pull you up so that just the tips of your toes touch that chair, and then we'll watch you until you can't stand on them any longer. After that you'll choke to death. Bring him here, boys."

The two men raised the detective from the floor and carried him to the chair. The noose was dropped around his neck, and the end of the knot placed under his left ear.

"Haul away, Fancher," ordered Derrington, and Nick was raised slowly upward until just the tips of his toes touched the chair under his feet.

And then, with a loud laugh, Derrington threw himself upon the hay, to watch his victim die.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE HOUR IN THE LOFT.

"Jiu Jitsu, Jiu Jitsu, Jiu Jitsu!"

That was what Nick Carter kept repeating to himself while the preparations for his death were going forward.

He was a past master in the Japanese art, and he felt that he could save himself if only his would-be murderers did not remain on the watch too long.

Jiu Jitsu is the name given to the Japanese art of absolute control of the muscles. For centuries it was maintained as a secret, save to a selected few of privileged ones close to the royal family of the flowery kingdom, but of late a knowledge of it had crept out, and Nick Carter, owing to his association with the mikado himself, in Japan, had been thoroughly instructed in it by the best of masters.

He knew positively, when they were about to hang him, that he could distend the muscles of his neck in such a manner that the rope would have no effect upon him—that it would be impossible for the noose to choke him; but he also knew that he could not maintain that attitude for an indefinite time.

When the noose was slipped over his head, he distended those muscles, and after a manner, according to the teachings and exercise of Jiu Jitsu, locked them there, so that when they raised him from the chair, the rope did not choke him in the least.

He had purposely refrained from speaking; he had purposely pretended to be still very weak from the effects of the blows he had received; and now, when they raised him from the chair, and he heard Derrington's taunting laugh, he lifted his toes from the chair, and curled his feet up under his knees, as if he were indeed choking.

He heard Derrington laugh again.

"Good!" exclaimed the outlaw. "It is taking effect quicker than I thought it would. You may take away the chair, Fancher. We'll go below. It's no fun watching him die. After all, I might better have shot him, and I'm a good notion to do it now. What do you say?"

"Aw, leave him alone," replied Fancher. "He's a dead one, all right, and the sound of a gun might bring unpleasant callers."

"All right," responded Derrington. "But let's go below, anyway. We'll leave him where he is for an hour, and then we'll come up and take him down. He'll be dead by that time."

And so the three men climbed down the ladder and left Nick Carter hanging to the beam, in the worst predicament he had ever been in in all his life.

"Shut that trap door!" ordered Derrington, and it was closed.

The instant when Nick Carter was certain that he was alone, he reached out with his feet, which were bound together, and just succeeded in touching the back of the chair which they had pulled from beneath him.

They had not moved it far enough, and he succeeded in getting his toes under the top bar of the back.

To bring it toward him and under him was the work of a second then, and in a moment more he was standing on the tips of his toes, so that the noose did not strain on his throat a particle.

But he was still in a precarious position, for his hands were bound together behind his back.

"God give me strength now, if ever!" he prayed; and then he strained at the cords on his wrists.

They cut into his flesh until the blood ran, but still he strained.

Presently a strand snapped; then another and another—and then the rope parted, and his hands were free!

Can you realize, reader, how little time it required him, then, to seize the rope over his head, to pull himself up until the noose was slack around his neck, to hold himself there with one hand, while with the other he dislodged the noose?

It was barely a moment before he was standing on the chair, free, for he reached into his pocket for a knife and cut the ropes around his ankles as soon as he felt his weight upon the chair.

Nick Carter was free.

He lowered himself silently, and was presently seated upon the chair; but he performed the act with great care, lest his motion might make a board creak, and thus warn the men who were waiting below.

He wiped the blood from his swollen wrists with his handkerchief, and then he sat there resting while he recovered his strength.

He smiled when he remembered that his captors had not once thought to search him or to deprive him of his weapons. They had doubtless thought there would be ample time for that after he was dead—and he had four revolvers in his possession. There were two small ones, which he always carried in his sleeves, and which were fastened there by spiral springs, and were ever ready for instant use, and there were two larger ones in his pockets.

"I think I'm a match for them now," he mused, as he took the two larger ones from his pockets and placed them on his knees. "Somebody in that outfit downstairs is going to get hurt presently. Killing is too good for them, but I must wing them, so as to put them out of business. But first I must rest here as long as possible, in order to get my strength back again."

He leaned back in his chair and commenced a lung exercise which also is a part of the Jiu Jitsu, and which speedily revived him.

He could hear the voices of the men talking together under him, and he could also understand a part of what they said.

But their conversation had very little interest for him.

He was well provided with evidence against these men now, and he meant soon to make it available.

Thus the minutes passed until he knew that the hour was almost gone; and then, he heard Derrington, in a loud tone, exclaim:

"Time is up, boys! Let's go and have a look at our mutton, eh?"

Nick raised himself upon the chair again.

He stood on the tips of his toes, and arranged the noose so that it would appear to be around his neck.

He realized that coming from the stronger light below into the deep gloom of the loft, they would not discover the error until they were all at the top of the ladder, or even in the loft itself; and he hoped that they would not notice that the position of the chair had been changed since they left him.

It was Fancher's face which appeared first at the trap door.

"Come on," he said. "I reckon he's a goner by this time," and he leaped upon the floor of the loft.

His companion—the man who had played the part of the coachman—followed, and after him came Derrington, so in less than a minute all three of them were in the loft, and approaching the spot where Nick Carter appeared to be hanging.

Nick noticed, with grim humor, that not one of them seemed to wish to approach the supposed corpse alone; they preferred to do it side by side. It is not a pleasant thing to do, to draw near the body of a hanged man.

But the detective did not permit them to take more than three steps in his direction before he acted.

He let himself down upon his heels on the chair with a jerk. He thrust out his two hands toward the men, each one containing a revolver.

There followed two simultaneous reports, and then a third, singly, and all three men went down like stricken bullocks.

Instantly Nick leaped forward, and even as he did so, one of the men—Derrington—half raised himself, pulled his own gun, and fired.

The weapon was discharged almost in Nick Carter's face, and he felt the bullet plow a furrow through his hair at the top of his head; but in that same instant the butt of one of his own weapons fell upon Derrington's head, and the outlaw collapsed.

Nick turned then, just as one of the others—Fancher—had raised his weapon to fire, for Nick had shot him through the knee, and he was still able to use his hands.

But the detective was in time. He knocked the pistol aside, and the bullet flew wide of its mark.

Fancher also receiving a stunning blow on the head, which laid him out; and the other man—the coachman—was already insensible, although not seriously wounded.

"Good!" muttered the detective. "They are all candidates for the chair; and now——"

He was interrupted by a loud banging upon the street door, and, descending hastily, he found a policeman there who demanded to know what the shooting was about.

"Come up the ladder, and I'll show you," he said, "and you can help me iron my three prisoners. I'm Nick Carter, officer, and you have arrived just in time. When we have fastened our prisoners so they cannot get away, you can send for the patrol wagon, and take them to the station house. I'll give you the credit for the arrests, too."

Derrington was shot through the jaw. He had an ugly wound, but not a serious one, and he recovered in time to pay the penalty of his crimes at Sing Sing, as did each of the others.

Ben Derrington, the prisoner at headquarters, was sent up for twenty years, as were also his compatriots in the poisoning affair, Tabor and Talbot.

* * * * * * *

It was past five o'clock in the afternoon when Nick Carter again entered the Waldorf, and he encountered Chick almost as soon as he passed through the door.

"Where is Derrington?" demanded the assistant. "He is Derrington, all right, just as you said, and the fellow at headquarters is his twin brother, Ben. We found the whole layout in Derrington's rooms. There is a written plan of the whole plot from beginning to end, with the names of everybody concerned in it, as well as copies of the instructions he gave to each of them. Where is he? Have you lost him?"

"Scarcely," replied Nick; and then he related all that had occurred since they parted, early in the afternoon.

* * * * * * *

The detective's next duty was at the Mammoth, where he had promised Clarence Morgan's widow that he would return.

He found Joseph on duty when he arrived, and, in reply to his question, Joseph told him that Agnes had requested, half an hour earlier, to be left alone with the corpse of her husband for a time.

"You should not have permitted that," said Nick; and he went hastily into the room of death.

And it was surely a room of death now, for Agnes Morgan was lying across the casket in which her husband's body rested, dead.

There was not a mark on her; there was no evidence of poison, and later, after the autopsy, it was announced that she had long been a victim of disease of the heart, which had finally killed her.

"And it was better so," said Nick, in conversation with the inspector. "What had that poor girl to live for Both her brothers disgraced, one to be electrocuted, and the other to languish in prison, and her husband murdered by one of them. It is God's mercy that she could pass away so easily."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 427, will contain "The Great Gold Swindle; or, The Little Giant's Masterpiece."

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